

An
Indian Boyhood

by

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HOLLIS & CARTER, LONDON, 1948.

PRINTED BY THE BOWERING PRESS OF LONDON
AND PLYMOUTH FOR HOLLIS AND CARTER
25 ASHLEY PLACE, LONDON, S.W.1

First published 1948

To my Mother and Father

Introduction

WHEN I was a child I lived the kind of life that in this book is lived by Gopal. All that I here tell of happened in my own experience, except only those things that concern the dweller in the house and garden with the white wall. It was not easy to distinguish fact from fancy in the bright silence of that garden.

The boys in this story all had nicknames as well as personal names. To avoid confusion I have chosen one or the other for each of them and kept to it. Gopal, Amal, and Kalyan are personal names. Chenu and Bundle are nicknames.

To represent the difference between the formal and the familiar modes of address, I have used the second person plural when children are talking to their elders, or for speech between strangers, the second person singular for conversations between equals and friends.



Prelude

THE long room, darkened in the afternoon, shuttered against the scorching Indian sun, should have been cool; cooled by the air filtering in through matting drenched in water; cool because a room darkened in the afternoon ought to be cool; or cool, best of reasons, because Gopal so much wanted it to be cool. Yet the heat weighed him down, and sweat trickled from his forehead into his eyes.

He turned again to his *First English Reader*:

Little Harry stole a pice.
He ran and bought a cake of rice.
He ate and got the stomach pain,
And vowed he'd never steal again.

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He appreciated the truth and justice of this. When one is eight years old, the world seems to be run on excellently good moral lines; virtue is rewarded and wickedness punished. Perhaps virtue is not always recognised; but wickedness is, without any exception, and Nemesis works untiringly.

But Gopal too had a "stomach pain", and he had stolen no pice. He reviewed his activities of the morning, and, strange to relate, not one of them seemed even worthy a rebuke; at that very moment he was toiling hard at his lessons; yet, despite his conscious freedom from sin, he was suffering tortures reserved for pice-thievers. In this perplexity he turned to his oracle on matters of human conduct, Beni—his parents' servant, but his friend, constant companion and final arbiter.

When Beni had heard his trouble, he shook his head sagely, and his great turban over his small wise face lolled from side to side, adding dignity to his judgment.

"Thou art but eight years old, brother, and I a man past fourteen. I tell thee, from my wide knowledge, that pleasure often brings pain, even where no sin is. Thy present trouble is due to the green mangoes I gave thee this morning."

"But, O Beni, if thou knewest that green mangoes give pain, why didst thou let me share thy fruit?"

"Suppose, brother, I had denied thee. Suppose I had eaten all myself, for they would not have pained *me*. What then? Wouldst thou not have thought, 'This Beni is no true friend. He eats all greedily, and, worse sin, tells lies; for why should he eat what gives pains.'"

Gopal was silenced, though he still felt that Beni should have warned him, and that his pain was somehow due to him.

In a little, Beni spoke again.

"Read to me, brother, something from thy book. There is much wisdom in it, though it may err in the matter of stomach pains."

"I am too busy; I must learn my task by evening. What canst thou know of this, for, though a man, thou canst neither read nor write. And call me not Brother, for thou art my servant."

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Gopal looked intently at his book. His cheeks felt hot.

He heard the shutter close as Beni went, and the room was still; quieter it seemed than before they had spoken. He looked at the white chinks of light in the shutters, back to his book, and always back to the place on the clean-swept floor, where Beni usually sat. He tried to learn his spellings, but they would not take hold in his mind. At last a lizard waddled across the white-washed wall. He shouted its rhyme:

Run! Little lizard, run quickly away.
We shall eat plum and frog fritters to-day.

That was what one must always say, just as, if the sun shone while it rained, one shouted:

The sun and the shower shall smooth the bedding,
For this is the day of the foxes' wedding.

Though he shouted for the lizard, and the lizard went, he was not happy. If Beni had been there, he would have known how right it was to shout, and he would have shouted too, and clapped his hands, and laughed; then it would have been good.

The afternoon was very hot, very quiet, and very long. Then suddenly, he realized that his stomach-ache was quite gone. But it might as well have stayed.

When the shutter banged, and Beni ran into the room, Gopal was glad. Beni was as glad as he, and excited.

"Listen!" he said. "Here comes one to cure thee."

Gopal heard the long-drawn cry coming nearer.

"I sell sixteen spices"—"I sell sixteen-in-one"—"Sixteen different"—"Sixtee-een spi-i-ices."

They ran into the street and stopped him. From his shoulder he took a box, which was divided into sixteen compartments. From each space he took a pinch of spice, and put it on the palm of his hand; then he rolled all into a large pill. While he did this, he told in a grave voice, not as one speaking of miracles, but rather as one repeating what he proudly knew to be common

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knowledge, of all the ills that the spices would cure. Where one of them failed, another would succeed; it was clear good sense.

Beni paid him a pice, and Gopal ate the pill. It was aromatic, sharp, sweet, but pleasant altogether.

When the pedlar had gone his singing way; one by one, other people began to pass along the street. The city was freeing itself from the ponderous heat. A lowing of conch horns sounded from the distant temples, and a thin breeze sprang up.

As they walked into the garden, Beni asked Gopal:

"Is not thy pain gone now?"

"Gone, brother, thanks to thee."

Beni smiled in his delight.

"See thou, brother, not all kinds of wisdom are written in thy books. What can they know of Sixteen Spices, and many such things; but I know, and I will tell thee all."

"Thou art wise, brother."

Gopal took his friendly hand, and was happy again.



Chapter One

“MY father’s house”, Gopal would say when speaking of his home; but it was his grandfather, the judge, who had built it, and whose personality still seemed to reign over it, though he had been dead many years. Nor was it a single house so much as a collection of houses. His grandfather had bought a tract of land, and on it had built two oblong buildings of stone, parallel to one another, each two stories high. The length of the outer building faced a quiet street, from which a carriage drive curved in through stone gates, crossed a peacock-frequented stretch of grass, and ran between the outer and inner buildings, under the jasmine-covered arch which connected them. Just before emerging again into the street, the drive passed beneath the shade of a great tamarind tree in which lived a multitude of crows.

The outer building faced the world. It had many rooms, in which the men of the house studied, played chess, or received

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their friends. Even the great number of guests that must, by custom, be asked to a feast of celebration could be housed in it.

The inner building had at its centre an open court; a court remote from the glare of the sun, surrounded by columns, and beyond them by the inmost rooms of the house. The tinkling of golden anklets, the clinking of ice in cool drinks, the odours of spices and ripe fruits, the sudden cry of a child, and the murmur of soft voices, all were part of the spirit of the centre court.

A wide field lay behind this inner building, and sheds and out-houses clustered round it. The end over against the tamarind tree gave on to a small garden enclosed by a low brick wall, in which were two wooden gates. Here were a cow and some goats; guava and mango trees also grew here. At the other end, behind the grass stretch, on which two peacocks usually sunned themselves, was a dense tangle of trees and creepers.

In "my father's house" dwelt not only Gopal's mother and father, but two of his father's brothers with their wives and children. Gopal's four cousins were all boys, but two were five and six years older than he, and the other two were babies. So, if he wanted companions of his own age, he had to walk half a mile along the street. Here was the house of his father's eldest brother, who had two grandsons of about Gopal's age. His eldest uncle, like his grandfather, was a judge, a stern old man, not lightly to be disturbed. But the two grandsons, Asok and Amal, could worry him almost with impunity.

One bright morning Gopal decided to call on Asok and Amal. As he was leaving, he met Beni, who was standing by the gates, staring at the tamarind tree with a look of dislike.

"Why dost thou stare so at the tree, O Beni?"

"It is an evil tree, and causes me harm. I will tell thee of this when I have time, but now I must go to the bazaar."

"Go to the bazaar! But, Beni, I am now on my way to fetch Asok and Amal, for didst thou not promise to teach us how to make glassy cotton for kite-flying?"

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"This morning I must work, but this afternoon I could prepare the cotton."

"But, O Beni, this afternoon their tutor goes to them. And we must all see how it is done. However, I will ask uncle to let them have a holiday to fly kites. Please show us about the cotton in the afternoon."

"Thou wilt ask the judge to let his grandsons have a holiday? O Gopal, thou art indeed a boy of courage. I wish thee success, and shall be ready with my materials."

Gopal took leave of Beni and went on his way, his faint misgivings about approaching his uncle mingled with anticipations of a pleasant afternoon preparing the cotton and kites.

When he reached his uncle's house, he found Amal and Asok sitting on the wall munching fried rice, watched by an interested group of five assorted birds and two young goats. From time to time they scattered a handful of rice among the spectators, which aroused the enthusiasm of the goats to such a pitch that they leapt on to the top of the wall and balanced on its edge, peering into the boys' faces with a look of the utmost gravity. Amal held out a handful of rice to one of the goats. The goat approached and began to eat, but before he had finished Amal butted him with his head. The goat butted back gently and went on eating. Amal again filled his hand, and repeated the performance. The goat ate more and more rapidly and butted back harder each time, until with a mighty effort he pushed Amal off the wall and sent him sprawling to the ground. Gopal and Asok shouted their applause, as Amal picked himself up unconcernedly.

"What of the kites, Gopal," he asked, "is Beni ready to show us?"

"Alas! He must go to the bazaar this morning. He can show us this afternoon, but your tutor is coming. Could we not ask uncle to allow a holiday?"

"A holiday? By all means, provided that it is thy task to ask grandfather. Asok and I are already in some disfavour over a matter of a certain word we taught Little Prince, the parrot, to say. A word of no great badness, yet not a seemly word."

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Gopal summoned up his courage.

"I will ask him. It is agreed, but when I ask, thou, Amal, shalt stand on one side of me and thou, Asok, on the other. We shall be braver so, and more likely to succeed."

"We will ask him together," said Asok, "that is, Gopal shall ask, and we will bravely support him."

"Let us wash first, and make a good appearance," said Amal, and the three went towards a large tank of water.

Washing involved much hard work, splashing water at one another and over the surrounding ground, and, although the boys were cleaner at the end, their clothes were drenched.

"Wring your clothes out," said Gopal, setting the example with his own. "Then we can stand in the sun until they are dry."

A few minutes later they were debating what Gopal was to say, while the steam from their damp clothes rose into the growing heat of the sun.

In a shaded room sat Gopal's uncle. The room was small, and three-quarters of the floor space were occupied by a wooden platform raised some six inches from the ground. This was covered with a white cloth, on which, in great state, the old man sat cross-legged before a chess-board. The chess-men were unusually large, and carved most intricately from ivory; but the pieces that had been white, when many years ago they had come from the hand of the Chinese craftsman who had laboured at them, were now mellowed to a light brown, and the pieces that had been red were faded to rose. Somehow the judge and his chess-men seemed in complete harmony; his skin had the same tint as the ancient ivory, and the mind that looked from his eyes was like his diversion, moving scrupulously in its well-ordered ways. Within the walls of the room in which he sat time had slowed down to a point where it went unnoticed; not even the ticking of a clock marked its passing; the only sound heard was when he occasionally refreshed himself by a puff at his hookah. The rose-water in its bowl, a blackened and polished coco-nut shell held in a net of copper filigree, would ripple into movement and

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relapse into stillness, hardly interrupting the silence. He sat and pondered his problem.

A sound of shuffling and whispering outside the room disturbed him, but his expression remained serene until, to his surprise, he saw the hesitant procession of three enter. The rule that no one was to disturb him in his own room had never yet been broken. Why then should his grandsons and his nephew presume thus? But his only acknowledgment of their presence was a deepened frown. He continued his study of the problem, which was of more than ordinary difficulty. Now that they stood in his presence none of the boys dared speak or move. A smell of damp clothes, a smell such as is usually associated with washermen, filled the room. At last Gopal made a great effort and whispered.

"O eldest uncle, with all respect, if you were to move the elephant——"

For a moment the old man looked angry; then he glanced at the board and his mood changed.

"If I moved the elephant, what then?" he asked.

"Then the white pieces would win."

"Why dost thou think so?"

"Because the elephant is very powerful and very wise."

"True, but the red side still has its prime minister, which is even more powerful. The elephant can move to any square, going from side to side or backwards and forwards, but the prime minister can do all this and move slant-wise in addition."

"But must not the red prime minister guard the red king?"

"That is justly said, Gopal. And so, in three moves, the white pieces win."

Deliberately he made the moves, carefully he replaced the pieces on their tray, put aside the wooden board, and relaxed, puffing his hookah with enjoyment.

"Why have I been disturbed to-day? You know my rules," he said at length, but not angrily. "And why do you bring with you a smell like a washerman's?"

"We have been washing", said Gopal, "to make ourselves clean

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to come before you. Our clothes also became wet. We have been drying them in the sun. They are not yet quite dry."

"Your intentions were, no doubt, commendable, though the result is far from pleasing to the nose. But still, Gopal, thou hast failed to explain the reason for this visit."

"We would ask—most respectfully, that is—whether eldest uncle permits—a holiday this afternoon for Amal and Asok to come to my father's house for making cotton for kite-flying when Beni is free to teach us?"

"Dost thou consider then, Gopal, that kite-flying is a more useful study than arithmetic?"

"It is not, but it would give us great joy."

The judge considered for a moment, then said:

"You have my permission, but, before you go, can one of you tell why I have granted your request?"

The boys were silent. Amal glanced at the chess-board.

"No, it is not because Gopal by a fortunate guess helped me to solve the problem. He did this by chance alone, not knowing the rules of the game, nor is it such a game as I would wish any of you to learn; I have found that young boys who excel at chess often have no special ability in other ways. I had two reasons for allowing this holiday. First, Gopal, instead of immediately troubling me with your plans, was courteous in trying to interest himself in what I did; secondly, you had all made some efforts to present a proper appearance, which showed due respect for an elder, even if the results were not what had been intended. The tutor will be informed that you have a holiday. Stay a moment. Here are three annas to buy kites. Go."

The boys went from the room with murmured thanks. Once outside, their pace quickened.

"We shall be able to buy many kites," shouted Gopal, "how surprised Beni will be."

"And a winder of polished bamboo," said Amal, "never yet have we owned a winder."

They ran towards the kite shop.

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In the tranquillity of his room the old man smoked his hookah. A reminiscent smile touched his lips, as if he saw, in the drifting smoke, visions of those far-off days when he too had flown kites and run the fields in a younger and happier world.

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"Do as I do, then we shall soon finish," he said.

The others at once set to work, and, each choosing a length, began to put a coating on it.

While they were thus engaged, a tall man, who carried himself with a slight stoop, and whose eyes were hidden by dark green spectacles with metal side shields, came out of the front building. Catching sight of the boys he paused, as though struck by an idea. He held up a loosely-closed hand before one eye, and peered at them through it, as through a spy-glass. Then he turned and re-entered the house.

"Second uncle has seen us," said Gopal ruefully, "he will now wish to do all himself. He will take charge. He will tell us all about the proper manner of flying kites. He will fly our kites for us. If ever he sees one doing anything he must explain and instruct."

"But perhaps he has some other work to do," said Amal "and sometimes, though rarely, he has something of interest to show."

In a few minutes the tall man returned, pushing along the drive a cumbersome apparatus, in appearance like some kind of infernal machine; it consisted of a large box of polished wood, furnished with several brass knobs and a rubber bulb, and supported on a wooden pedestal with wheels.

"Behold, nephew and grand-nephews, my new camera. It was delivered this morning. I am anxious to try its powers. I think that kite-flying should prove a suitable subject. A series of pictures—'Boys preparing cotton for kite games'—'Boys floating kite into air'—'Boys manoeuvring kite to attack'—'Pack of boys pursuing vanquished kite through streets'."

He removed his glasses, clicked the side pieces open and shut and replaced them, frowning importantly as the boys gathered round to admire the camera.

"It is a beautiful machine," said Gopal.

"Such a one I have never seen," said Asok. "And we are to have our picture made by it. That is good."

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"My camera is the most excellent in the whole of Calcutta. Every device of ingenuity has been fitted to it. No longer do I need to hold a cap in front as with my old one; I merely press this bulb. Nor do you have to stand still for me to make your picture; this camera can catch the image of a trotting horse. Here is another arrangement of art, this brass knob. If I turn it, so, the whole front of the camera rises. This is for making pictures of tall buildings. Even the great Kutb Minar at Delhi is not too tall for it. Unfortunately there are no tall buildings in the neighbourhood, and the camera is too heavy to be carried far; but, if anyone should decide to build a tower near here, the device would prove most useful.

"Now I will set to work. Continue, boys, as if I had not come. Show smiling faces. Not all of you. Thou, Asok, seem intent on the task, Beni, return at once; the more boys the better the picture."

"Sir, I pray, do not take my shadow," said Beni, who had withdrawn some distance, "that would take substance from my body."

"That is a foolish superstition. Tell him, nephews, not to fear. This is science, the wisdom of the future. O Beni, thou hast no fear to ride in a tram-car, why shouldst thou fear this box for making pictures?"

But Beni drew further away, and seemed apprehensive.

The argument might have continued, but at this moment a stranger came in through the gates. He was a boy of about fifteen, slim, with an air of elegance.

He advanced slowly towards the tall man, and saluted him with a namaskar, placing the palms of his hands together, with the finger-tips level with his mouth. The boys saw, from the sacred thread about his neck, that he was a Brahmin.

"The favour of a cup of water, sir, I beg," he said.

Gopal, who had already seen the stranger a few times, and become interested in him because he was always alone and no-one seemed to know anything about him, ran at once to fetch what he asked.

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"What is your name, and whence do you come?" asked second uncle.

"I am called Dasu. My family came recently from our home village to Calcutta. My father is a learned man, a teacher of Sanskrit."

"I had heard of his arrival in the neighbourhood. He is reputed to be a great scholar. I must call to pay my respects. Ah! Here is Gopal with the water, nor has he forgotten to put some ice in it. It is fortunate that you came just now, as I should be grateful for your help."

Gopal handed a red earthenware cup to the Brahmin, who took it with a graceful courtesy, raised it aloft, tilted back his head, and poured a stream of cold water into his mouth, without touching his lips to the cup. When he had finished, he handed it back to Gopal, who went away and threw it on a rubbish heap. It was one of the crudely made cups which are used only once and discarded.

"I am making a picture of boys flying kites," second uncle continued, "but my nephews are not here in sufficient numbers, and my two sons have gone to stay with an aunt. Would you be willing to appear in my photograph?"

Dasu was starting to trace a gesture of dissent, when second uncle added quickly:

"Your appearance would greatly enhance the beauty of the picture." Gopal saw that Dasu was not free from personal vanity, for he agreed to pose with only a slight show of reluctance. Turning, he noticed Gopal's expression, and smiled.

"Group yourselves as before, nephews. Dasu, do thou appear to be directing them," said second uncle. "See now, O Beni, here is a Brahmin boy, who does as I ask, yet thou dost not deign to do so."

He placed his head beneath a black cloth attached to the camera; he emerged again and made them all change their positions; he twisted various brass screws, muttering what sounded like the incantations of some magic rite; and finally he pressed the bulb.

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"It is finished," he said, as he trundled his machine away, "but I shall return later to make more pictures."

When he had gone the boys at once lost their air of constraint. Beni returned and began to wind the cotton, which was by this time dry, on to the winder. Dasu took Gopal by the arm, and walked towards the gates.

"It was not from vanity that I consented," he said, "but for me it is easier to do a gracious action than an ungracious one. I held off at first because I dislike machines; my dislike is based on reason. And I mistrust enthusiasm. Dost thou understand, or art thou too young?"

"I understand. Thou art like eldest uncle. Shall I see thee again?"

"Surely we shall meet again; but now I must go."

Gopal watched him down the road until he turned a corner. There went one who knew much, and who would know more, one who could answer many questions. Beni was useful for some practical matters, but, for the things of the mind, Gopal often had to feign ignorance to avoid hurting the older boy's pride of knowledge.

"Come, Gopal," called Asok, "all is ready. See how sharp the cotton is."

With a sawing motion he applied a length of cotton to a thick leaf and cut it in two.

Beni picked up one of the diamond-shaped kites and attached the cotton to the centre of the string loop which ran from the tip to the tail.

"O Gopal," he said, handing him the winder, "wilt thou fly the first one?"

He ran some distance away with the kite, while Gopal held the winder loosely, allowing the cotton to unroll. With a quick jerk Beni floated the kite into the air; Gopal tugged at the cotton and the kite rose, he released it and it lost height a little, and so he continued, pulling in and each time releasing a little more cotton, until suddenly the kite caught the breeze and soared away.

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There were already five or six kites not far off veering and fencing for position; as soon as Gopal's appeared among them, one of them moved over to attack. It described a semi-circle in the air and dived tip downward until its cotton crossed that of Gopal's kite. For a moment the two glazed cottons sawed one another; then the attacking kite floated loose, aimlessly drifting away. When it came to land, a crowd of shouting boys would jostle one another to get it, such a windfall might come to any boy walking the streets in the kite-flying season, or perhaps it would catch in a tree, never to fly again.

"Did I not tell thee my cotton was good cotton," said Beni, capering with joy, "even though the other kite had the advantage of the attack, we won."

"Let me fly it now," said Amal, and Gopal handed him the winder.

All the boys had taken a turn, and two more vanquished kites had floated to earth, when a large green kite appeared in the air. It went rushing up with great speed, and started to dive and turn to avoid any unexpected attack.

"Beware," said Beni to Asok, who had the winder, "that one is handled by a skilled kite-flyer. Now comes a real test for my cotton."

Asok drew in the cotton rapidly to make his kite rise, but the green kite curved under it, crossed cottons, and began to recede. Suddenly the tension on the winder slackened, and Asok had to wind in his cotton which was falling through the air; his kite faltered and drifted loose.

"He has indeed a cunning hand," said Beni, "luckily we have more kites to try against him."

Three kites, one after another, were sent up, but the green kite cut each one loose in turn.

"We must defeat him," said Beni, making ready a fifth kite. "See, he has just brought down one of the others."

Beni himself took the winder this time. As his kite appeared in the air, the green one as usual circled under it. Beni allowed

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the cottons to engage, gave a quick tug, released, and raised his kite clear above the other. The green kite chased his up higher. Again they engaged. Again Beni gave the quick tug and release. At the third effort, the green kite seemed to shudder for a moment. Beni dropped the winder and began to haul in the cotton hand over hand. The green kite turned over and over as it fell. A shout of happiness went up from the boys.

"My cotton wins in the end," said Beni, smiling.

"And thy skill," said Gopal.

"Let us give the winder as a present to Beni," said Asok. Amal and Gopal agreed that it would be a fitting tribute. Beni was delighted.

"If it is mine to keep, let it be for all to use," he said.

"It has been a good afternoon," said Gopal.

"It has indeed," answered the others, "it is pleasant to fly kites. But Gopal's chief pleasure had been in meeting Dasu. He seemed unlike any other boy. His manner suggested pride and mockery, but, behind this, Gopal felt sure that he was kind and wise. They would meet again.



Chapter Three

HIGH over the bazaar a kite hovered, an almost imperceptible fleck on the blue enamel of the sky. Poised and motionless, the bird of prey seemed less alive even than its namesake, a flimsy structure of tissue paper and bamboo splints; but nothing escaped this watcher in the sky. Its eye mirrored a wide stretch of landscape, but its attention was concentrated on the bazaar and its immediate surroundings, whence it hoped to get its next meal. It saw the boats on the Ganges, a tram-car running through fields, the nose of a jackal that momentarily showed from a hole in a ruined wall, three vultures sunning themselves on a roof, and a boy walking along a lane.

Gopal, as he walked towards the bazaar clutching some money in his hand, felt himself a rather more important person than usual. He was wearing his sky-blue silk shirt, which was his special dress for feast days and celebrations. This was only because during the week he had torn or soiled all his other shirts, so that his mother had no other resource than to clothe him thus gaily, almost as if to celebrate his having been particularly careless. But Gopal, without worrying too much about its cause, rejoiced in

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his brave attire. Nor was this his only pleasure; Beni, who ordinarily did the shopping, was busy on other work, and Gopal had been sent in his place to buy some sweets.

When at length he came out of the glaring heat into the cool dimness of the bazaar, Gopal found that he had chosen the entrance near which the sellers of sweets had their stalls. Sitting cross-legged in one of these was his friend Nobin, the son of the confectioner.

"O Gopal," called Nobin, "come and see my tops." He showed three beautifully coloured tops which he had won.

"They are indeed fine," said Gopal, "thou art fortunate. To-day I come as a customer. My mother sent me. Beni is working in the big field. I will have three annas' worth of those good sweets."

"Friend Gopal, thou shalt have the choicest. They are freshly made, and delicious to taste."

In exchange for his three annas, Gopal received twelve sweets, each as big as a plum, roasted to a golden brown and soaked in syrup. While Nobin was making a cone of clean leaves pegged together with splinters of wood to hold the sweets, an inspiration came to Gopal.

"See, good Nobin," he said, "why not exchange one of the tops with me? I will give three glass marbles with many-coloured lines within and all clear and uncracked for one of thy tops."

The exchange was made, Gopal was turning to go, but the need to do something to seal the bargain and round it off made him pause. It was a very fine top.

"May I offer a sweet?" he said, holding out the cone. Nobin, although a confectioner's son, liked sweets as much as any other boy; probably because he was not allowed to raid the stock, and lived a life of continual temptation. So Nobin took a sweet, and Gopal, to keep him in countenance, took one himself.

Having left Nobin with a promise to meet later, he next went to pay a call on old Abdul, the perfume-seller. Abdul was grey-bearded and wrinkled. He extracted the scents from flowers and trapped them in oil. His tiny flasks were famous; but this was

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not what interested Gopal. Abdul sold fireworks in season, Chinese crackers and rockets; he also gave advice on making one's own fireworks. Gopal wanted some information about charcoal—how much the wood should be allowed to burn before being buried in a hole in the ground. Abdul, as usual, was full of wisdom on this and kindred subjects. When Gopal had learnt enough, politeness demanded that he should offer Abdul a sweet. Abdul deigned to accept, and Gopal, a good host, took one himself.

He was about to start homeward, when one of the fishmongers called him over. Gopal told him that he was not needing any fish to-day, but stayed to watch a lion-fish swimming about in a big earthenware bowl. It was like a small eel with a spike on each side of its head. Gopal tried to catch it in his hand without being pricked. He made a grab at it, but the fish swung its body round and punctured the back of his hand. Having amused himself for a few minutes and collected several more scratches, he refreshed himself with another sweet and gave one each to the fishmonger and his boy.

Now it was time to be getting back. Gopal was almost out of the bazaar when he chanced on two distant cousins. Greetings were exchanged, and three more sweets consumed.

Outside the gate a slight apprehension began to make itself felt in his mind. He looked at the two remaining sweets in the cone. There would be trouble. Without doubt, there would be great trouble.

As it was afternoon most people were indoors, and the watching kite had so far seen no suitable quarry. Now it saw the boy returning from the bazaar with a package in his hand. As if some unseen support had been removed, the kite dropped from the upper sky with screaming speed. Gopal felt the beating of wings in his face and was thrown to the ground. The kite soared away with the package.

In a few moments a knot of people collected. Someone picked Gopal up and brushed the dust from him. There was excited talk. Someone pointed to the torn sleeve of the sky-blue shirt. How

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lucky the boy was, not to have had his arm slit by the bird's beak! Gopal was almost in tears. No sweets at all; his best shirt torn; the trouble would be enormous.

Old Abdul hobbled out drawn by the commotion. At once he saw the situation. Taking Gopal by the hand he led him back to the perfume stall. He felt under a cushion and produced a purse. He put a coin into Gopal's hand.

"Do not weep, my son," said old Abdul, "this will buy some sweets for thee. Keep what money is left over. The fireworks will be here very soon. For what remains I will sell thee a bunch of the green and red crackers from China."

With thankful murmurs Gopal ran back to the sweet stall. He looked at Abdul's gift. It was a four-anna piece.

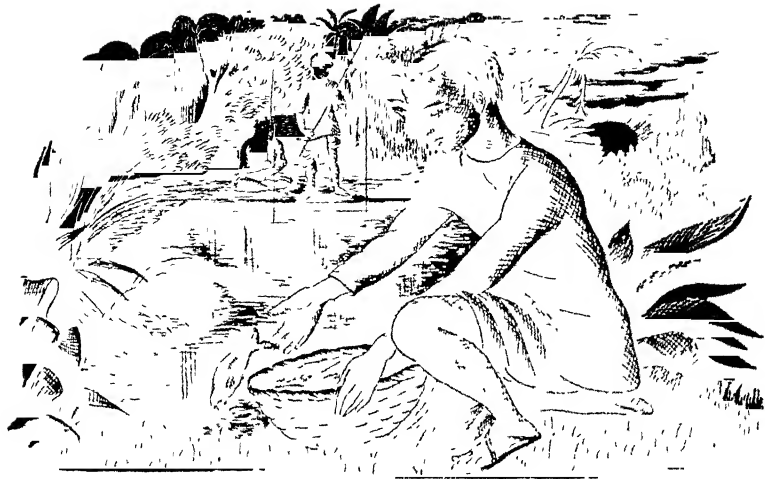
Gopal bought twelve fresh sweets for his mother. His mother, when she heard the story, forgave him for tearing his shirt, glad that he himself was unhurt.

A little later Gopal sat dangling his legs over the jasmine-covered stone arch. He was telling his story for about the tenth time to Beni, Amal, Asok, and youngest uncle's two sons, Chenu and Bundle. The kite in this version had assumed the proportions of Sindbad's Roc. Bundle, who was a fat little boy of five, seemed to live through the story as it was told; his eyes and mouth opened wider and wider. When the climax was reached, he stamped and shouted the words after Gopal:

"Down came a vast bird," Bundle and Gopal stretched their arms out wide, "as big as a house—feathery wings—beating—beak—claws—snatched it right away—tore my shirt—thrown on the ground—boun!"

"Poor Gopal! Poor Gopal!" added Bundle, in sorrow and delight.

The kite itself, when it found that instead of meat or fish it had wasted its pains on two sweets, dropped the packet in the dust, where it fed a colony of ants, and flew back to its station over the bazaar. Soon there would be other shoppers. Tireless, it renewed its vigil.



Chapter Four

"COME down and see the picture I made," said second uncle to Gopal, who was standing on the verandah of the front building. Gopal went into the house, and reappeared a moment later to join him by the tamarind tree.

"Dost thou see anything remarkable about it?" asked his uncle, giving him the photograph.

Gopal scanned it carefully. There was the cotton stretched between the sticks; there were Amal, Asok and himself, apparently hard at work; there was Dasu, looking even more elegant than in life, and conveying somehow that he was only appearing in the picture under protest.

"I see nothing, O second uncle, unless it is that the grass beneath our feet, blown by the breeze, looks like water."

"That is it, O Gopal; so thou too hast seen it. Now this is of great interest, for, many years ago, before thy birth, the space where the peacocks walk to-day was a fish-pool; afterwards it was filled in. Is it not strange that in my picture it appears as if you were all standing on water."

"I remember now. Father once told me of this," Gopal, quoting

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his father's words, adopted his expression and tone. "He said that when he was a boy every large house had its own fish-pool; that it was a great pity this custom had died, as it added to the beauty of a house and gave fish for the kitchen too. He said also that soon the country would be ruined, with mills and bioscopes and motor-cars and phut-phut machines (motor-cycles) everywhere."

"There is no connexion between fish-pools and bioscopes"—second uncle began angrily and broke off, remembering that it would be unseemly to continue with Gopal an argument that he had often had with Gopal's father. It was a question on which the brothers were divided; Gopal's father and eldest uncle hated mechanical science and machines, but youngest uncle was in favour of them, and with second uncle they were a mania. He would read any popular scientific periodical he could obtain, and had the doubtful distinction of having introduced the first motor-car into the neighbourhood. It had never completed a journey without breaking down, and wherever it went it was followed by the ironic cheers of bazaar boys. This first stinking chariot had been replaced by a more modern and efficient vehicle, but the very fact that it worked only increased eldest uncle's look of disgust when he chanced to see it. Gopal naturally took his father's opinion, while Bundle and Chenu, as earnest supporters of the machine, had invented a motor-car game. It consisted in shuffling round the garden with their hands clasped before them, emitting a whirring noise, and every now and then changing gear with a loud cough. They could carry on this monotonous performance for hours at a time, and apparently derived great satisfaction from it. Gopal would regard the activities of these babies of five and three years old with as good an imitation of eldest uncle's disdainful expression as he could compass.

He waited now with a feeling of repression for second uncle to continue. It seemed unjust that out of customary respect he would not be allowed to bring out his father's arguments against machines.

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"Science is the wisdom——" second uncle began again, and again stopped as he caught sight of a thin man of medium height walking briskly towards them.

"Science is the wisdom of the future," said Gopal's father, joining them. His tone of voice and the set of his face expressed high seriousness, only his eyes behind gold-rimmed spectacles were alive with amusement.

"Brother, I have in vain tried to reason with thee in the past, said second uncle, "but thy mind is shut against argument. What of medical science? Dost thou deny that many lives are saved every day?"

"Medical science is as old as human wisdom. Naturally it makes some progress over the ages, also it falls into errors. To-day the main source of error is fashion. At one moment everyone's appendix must be removed, at another electrical machines are pressed into service; someone decides that hypnotism can cure all mental ailments, and a new fashion is started. Soon, it may be, some theory may arise more pernicious in its results than any yet known; the times are propitious. It matters not whether it be based on falsehood; subtle arguments are ever more convincing than truth. But medicine should not be confused with machines. These are new and diabolical. Medicine, in time, rediscovers old truths and confirms them, so that it contains a solid core of wisdom despite transient errors; but machinery will destroy the greatness of man's mind; unless we despise it, we shall become as the ants, mindless toilers for the best good of a mindless state."

"Thy subtle arguments shall not stop progress. Civilization marches on, man cannot turn back——"

"That is the chieftest error of all, brother, the belief that new ideas are of necessity progress. Those who are of thy way of thinking see a great road along which mankind travels, some peoples having gone further than others; they see this road stretched into the future, scattered with treasures for those who march in the van. I and my like see time as a vast wilderness beset with pit-falls and swamps, but in a few spots, difficult of access, are

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pleasant groves, fit places for meditation, where lie the fountains of wisdom. Armies of men, led by demented ones, hasten to and fro at random pursuing phantoms. Should they chance on one of the groves of wisdom, and find there some philosopher, they slay him at once, saying, 'See this fool, who would impede our march into the glorious future'. But, soon or late, these armies fall into the pits or are engulfed in the swamps, leaving their children to follow after."

"This is random speech. What has this to do with modern science? Already man can sail among the clouds, soon, I learn, it will be possible to speak to cities on the remote side of the world, even, maybe, to see what is happening there. Consider what has been accomplished; travel, faster than was ever thought possible, living pictures, messages flashed in a moment over thousands of miles, photographs of the inmost organs of men and animals. Are these wonders to be derided?"

"Brother, I once saw a man levitate himself into the air. He remained floating without support. This seemed to me a matter neither for derision nor for admiration. He was a person of no great understanding. If all men could raise themselves thus, where would the gain be; in crossing streams without wetting one's clothes? Men may travel with the speed of lightning, but of what good is this as an end in itself, or for the purpose of forestalling another in some cheating trade. What advantage is there in speaking to remote parts of the world, if men have naught but folly or lies to speak? At this moment there is a war in France. There the newly invented ships of the air are being used in the manner long ago foretold. Dost thou remember how it tells in the Ramayana of winged and armoured chariots hovering over a city to hurl down thunderbolts of destruction on the inhabitants? It is true that at present these wind ships are almost as dangerous to those who employ them as to their enemies, but the time will come soon when these and many more devil's devices will be perfected. There is good reason to believe that whatever man can conceive in his mind he can carry out in fact. So we can

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envisage the prospect of great and prosperous cities, with their stored-up wealth of learning, vanishing in a moment at the will of some maniac. I can foresee continents laid waste and mountains tumbling. Mark this, brother, that those who spend their lives in the worship of machines have minds incapable of fruitful thought. Arid and sterile, they pursue paths untouched by philosophy or humanity. Following them and pressing them on are their minions, the money snatchers and war-mongers, a crowd of corruption. But, against all this evil, we can conceive a world at peace, a world free from want, a world where mechanical devices would be put at their proper level and used for the play and diversion of the great minds in their childhood. Since we can imagine such a world, in some sense it exists already. It may be that in two thousand years the age of the machine will have passed over without destroying all mankind; then, I pray, we might realize such a world."

"I see, brother, that it is useless to reason against thy muddled arguments," said second uncle. "And thou, Gopal, hast thou followed this talk? Art thou of thy father's way of thinking?"

"I have understood a little. I believe whatever my father believes. Could we not have the fish-pool again?"

Gopal's father smiled.

"What is this talk of fish-pools?" he asked.

"Gopal was speaking of the fish-pool we used to have. For some reason he confuses the absence of fish-pools with the presence of machines. I cannot remember now why we had the pool filled in, but I see no reason why it should not be dug out again. I would supervise the work myself."

"The reason was what might be called the greed for land. We all suffer from this. Even to see a pond where there might be solid land, our land, distresses us. But I agree with all my heart, let us again have a fish-pool. We must consult youngest brother. If he too agrees, as he surely will, the work can be begun."

As his father and uncle walked away in consultation, Gopal set

off for eldest's uncle's house. On the way he met Amal and Asok who were coming to visit him.

"O Amal, O Asok, here is great news," he shouted. "We are to have a pool filled with fish. Where the peacocks walk is to be dug out, and much water poured in. They will bring many kinds of fish, and there will be lotus plants. We could put in gold-fish."

In eager discussion the three boys went to survey the ground.

"Come brother," they said, seeing Beni, "come and see our new pond."

"What pond is this?"

"It is not yet there," said Gopal, "but soon it will be, and fish, and water-plants."

Suddenly the stretch of grass had assumed magical properties. All the family went to gaze at it. In the evening, Gopal walked to and fro on it, rehearsing in an undertone, "In my father's house is a great fish-pool with hundreds of fishes." Bundle and Chenu sat at the supposed edge of the pond that was to be, holding out two long sticks with pieces of cotton hanging from the tips; already they were fishing.

For the next month the workmen who did the digging were overwhelmed with unwanted assistance from the children of the house and as many of their friends as the ground would hold. The banished peacocks had to share the fruit garden with the cows and goats.

At last the day came for filling the pond. Hour after hour water poured in through two conduits, and in the early evening the pond was full. The water flashed and gleamed in the rays of the setting sun. In the presence of a crowd, Gopal walked to the brink of the pool. He carried a basket filled with wet grass on which lay the first fish. He picked it up and slid it into the water. With a gleam of silver, it flashed swiftly away. On the far side of the pool Bundle and Chenu, still fishing, raised a cheer. Life had come to the pool.



Chapter Five

EARLY one morning Gopal was awakened by a raucous clamour. When he went to the verandah and looked out, he saw a large congregation of crows under the tamarind tree. They kept up a continuous outcry, and from time to time other crows from neighbouring trees would join them. Evidently they had been alarmed by some occurrence much out of the ordinary. They seemed to be arguing as to what they should do; occasionally one of them would fly up to the tree, examine a certain branch, and then return to the others as if making a report. Sometimes three or four together would flap around the same branch, and sink to earth in a conference of harsh caws. Gopal gathered that the object of their concern lay at the point where the crowd was thickest, but he could not see what it was.

He dressed quickly and ran to find out what had happened. As he approached, the crows advanced croaking defiantly to meet him. He saw now that one of the fledgelings had fallen out of its nest and lay on the grass making feeble movements with its wings. The crows were trying to find some way of putting it back in the nest, which was on the branch they had been inspecting. Gopal took a step forward, intending to pick up the fledgeling, but the

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demeanour of the crows became so menacing and the clamour so deafening that he retreated a little way and waited to see what they would do. As if his presence had driven it to this desperate effort, one of the crows picked up the fledgeling in its beak and fluttered a few feet over the ground, only to come to earth again. Again it tried and again failed. But at the third attempt it made a great effort. The weighty beating of its wings slapped the air, and amid a crescendo of caws it reached the nest and laid the fledgeling in it. Exhausted, it settled down on the nest. It was the mother crow. The other birds began to disperse, but for some time afterwards the harsh voices continued, though less loudly, as if they were talking over the morning's adventure.

Gopal walked over to the tree and stood looking up at the nest when he heard Beni's voice.

"Do not go near the evil tree, brother. Come away. Come away."

"Why is it an evil tree, O Beni? What harm can a tree do?"

"It is not the tree itself. It is that which dwells in it."

"Dost thou mean the crows?"

"No, the crows are harmless. There is something—something most evil. Come with me and I will tell thee."

Beni led Gopal into one of the sheds behind the rear building. Here was a tin box in which Beni kept his most valued possessions. He lifted the lid, and Gopal saw some plaster images of gods, a beautiful conch shell, a clay model of a Jagannath car, and a kaleidoscope.

"O Beni, may I look through it?" he said.

Beni gave him the cardboard tube, and holding it up to the light Gopal saw the wonderful star-shaped patterns that seemed to be made of emeralds and rubies and amethysts. He knew that inside the tube there were only a few fragments of coloured glass and a piece of bent tin. That was all that he had found when he had broken open his own kaleidoscope. He had wondered how these simple elements could produce such complex and ever-changing designs.

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"How beautiful it is, Beni! I shall ask my father to buy me another."

Beni hesitated for a moment, then, "Take mine," he said, "I make thee a gift."

"No, I have many toys. This is one of thy most loved things."

"Take it. There is no merit in giving what is without value."

Gopal tried to return it, but Beni put it back in his hand and forced his fingers round it.

"Now I will show thee that which has to do with the tree," said Beni, "take this and look."

He brought out from the box a large sheet of glossy paper covered with coloured pictures. Gopal looked at the pictures. They were horrifying. Foul demons with the heads of swine, alligators, and serpents were torturing men. They were casting them alive into furnaces, flaying them, hammering spikes into their heads, dismembering them, while everywhere lay hideous remains, being devoured by fat white worms.

"These are devils", said Beni, "punishing the wicked, who during their lives caused harm to men and beasts."

"But there is nothing here about tamarind trees?"

"I will tell thee. These devils are not all confined to the nether world. Some of them wander abroad to plague living men." Beni leant forward and whispered, "There is one in that tree."

"O Beni, this is foolish talk. Thou sayest that thou art a man, yet thou hast such beliefs. My father told me that neither rakshas nor devils nor bhuts really exist. These are things from old tales."

"They are true. Should I not know, who am afflicted by the devil in the tree. Dost thou not remember when my hand was swollen? That was because, one day, I touched the tree. And when the moon is full, which is the time of the devil's greatest power, my head is filled with pain. Worse ills might have befallen me, but I carry always this charm."

Beni showed an amulet which hung by a piece of cord from his neck. It was a very small copper tube of hexagonal section, sealed at each end with wax.

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"It contains a powerful writing from the Scriptures, set down and sealed by a holy man. The devil fears it."

"But how could there be a devil in our tamarind tree? It is an ordinary tree. I will climb it and show thee that there is nothing to fear. There are only crows, and baby crows."

Beni shook his head. He put away the pictures in his box. They walked out of the shed.

"He dwells in that branch," Beni said, catching Gopal by the shoulder and pointing. "You may think that now there is nothing to fear, but at night, Gopal, it is not so. The evil powers come forth at night. Never do I go out by that gate, never, after the sun is gone."

"There is a nest in the branch beneath thy demon's branch. How is it the crows do not fear him?"

"He cares not for crows. Only men he seeks to torment. He seeks me."

Gopal's father and youngest uncle came walking under the stone arch, conversing. Each held his left hand cupped before him, and occasionally they interrupted their talk to chew at a twig held in the right hand. In their hands they had charcoal; they were preparing the aromatic twigs for the morning ritual of cleaning their teeth. They had bathed already, and in a leisurely mood were enjoying the morning air. Suddenly Gopal remembered that in his preoccupation with crows and demons he had completely forgotten his bath. He started to walk away before he should be noticed. Beni had already gone.

"Gopal," called his father, "what is that in thy hand?"

He turned and greeted respectfully his uncle and father.

"An image-tube, O father. Such as I had before, but broke. Beni gave it to me."

"A kaleidoscope, is it? Let me see. It is an interesting toy. But it is not right that thou shouldst take gifts from our servant. He is very poor. Dost thou know that he earns only ten rupees a month, and from this he keeps his mother?"

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"That is very little, O father. Could you not pay him more. Everyone says we are wealthy, and he is a very good man."

"So, everyone says we are wealthy? Hear, my brother, Gopal thinks he is the son of a rich man. As thou sayest, Gopal, he is a good boy and a good servant, but thy father is too poor to pay more. All my land is mortgaged. That means, for thy understanding, that I am no rich man. However, he is in truth a good boy, and I will pay him one rupee more a month. Thou art permitted to tell him. Go."

Gopal started to run to find Beni, but his father called him back.

"Remember, Gopal, not to speak of my being a poor man. I would punish thee if I heard a word of this. We would not have the mob know all our affairs. Besides, thy eldest and second uncles are men of some substance. Now depart. One moment, thou art not clean and proper. It seems thou hast not taken thy bath. How is this?"

Gopal told of the crows, but said nothing of Beni's demon.

"Yes, it is no bad thing to study the habits of birds and animals, but bathe now quickly and get to thy lessons."

When Gopal had gone, his father turned to the youngest brother.

"See, brother, how even my son thinks we are rich because we live in a large house. Yet thou and I consider ourselves the poorest of men. Alas! I think our children will be poorer still unless they take to usury or cheating trades. Our time is over and past."

His brother laughed. Physically a vigorous man, he cared little how the world's or even his own affairs went. His strength was renowned locally. Once when he had lost the key to a room, he had with his bare hands torn two iron bars from their stone sockets to get in through the window. The bars had been hammered straight and replaced, but they rattled loosely to this day. The children of the house always told new visitors the tale of his strength, and led them to the spot for proof.

"Why should we worry," he said, "what will be will be. I care not whether men call me 'your honour', so that I have enough

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to eat and a place to sleep. And still we can do some things. Not all men can have a fish-pool at will. Come, brother, let us go and look at our pool. Take pride in thy son's idea. Wisdom comes from a child."

"That is indeed true. I believe that wisdom comes from children. An intelligent boy has an understanding in no way inferior to that of a grown man; he lacks only experience. But on those occasions when experience is not needed, a boy's judgment is as good as a man's, sometimes better, as the boy's mind is free from bias. Often we forget this when talking in the presence of our children. We think that the matter is too complex for them to have any notion of our subject. We are wrong, for they not only remember all that is said, but afterwards try to discover the meaning of whatever they have failed to understand. For example, Gopal has often heard our arguments about the doubtful benefits of science, and I have gathered from certain remarks he has let fall that not only is he my ardent champion but also he has a fairly clear idea of the two sides of the dispute. Similarly, I am sure, in a few days he will know what a mortgage is. I am, however, pleased with him for suggesting the pool, he prevented my argument with second brother from becoming too heated; arguments in the family often degenerate into mere wrangling. And the pool gladdens my heart. How beautiful it was last night when the moon rose."

"How beautiful are the fresh fish we can get from it. Even plainly fried in mustard oil they are delicious. For thee, brother, there are the lotus, the poetry of night over the water, the perfume of jasmine, the molten silver of the reflected moon; but for me—O brother, what perfume is there like that of a savoury fish curry, especially if the fish be a choice *rui*."

Gopal's father laughed, and pleasantly bantering one another the brothers walked over to the pool.

All through the day, while he worked at his lessons, while he ate, and while he rested, for once, during the heat of the afternoon, thoughts of Beni recurred to Gopal. How very poor he

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was, yet how kind and generous, how overjoyed he had been to learn of the extra rupee he was to receive, and only because he would be able to give more to his mother; could not some way be found to end his fear of the devil in the tree? At last Gopal decided what to do.

In the early evening he set out for a walk alone. He had discovered where Dasu the Brahmin lived, and he walked in the direction of his house. It was further away from home than Gopal usually went. He was crossing a small park on his way, when he saw approaching from the distance a slim figure. He recognized Dasu at once. This was lucky. Now they would seem to meet by chance, and he could leave Gopal as soon as he wished. When he came near, Gopal greeted him with a formal namaskar.

"O Gopal," said Dasu, "here is a fortunate meeting. Hast thou any particular business, or shall we walk together to drink the evening air?"

"I will walk gladly—I shall be pleased to walk—with thee."

"Good, we will walk to the river, and I will tell thee a tale. There is time to go there and for me to leave thee at thy gate before dark. Now this tale, which delights me, we have been reading at college. It is about a great hero, by name Odysseus, and his marvellous adventures. It comes from Europe of the olden days, but the story is not unlike some of our Sanskrit classical writings. This week we have been reading of the adventures of the hero among one-eyed monsters. These monsters——"

"May I ask something? Are there truly monsters and devils? My father says no, but Beni told me of a devil in my father's house."

Gopal related what had happened that morning.

"And poor Beni goes always in fear," he ended. "Can we not stop this?"

For a while Dasu remained in thought, and they walked on without speaking.

At length, "Of course there is no evil spirit in the tree," said Dasu, "but it would be no use trying to persuade Beni simply

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by argument. If, however, someone were to make a ceremony of exorcism, that is to say of expelling a devil, I think he would be satisfied. But it should be someone he believes to have this power. I, as a Brahmin, could probably convince him. After all, there is an evil spirit, in the sense that Beni believes in him, so it is not simply a deception. There are deceptions which are truths and truths which are deceptions."

"If thou wilt do this, I shall be happy. I once deceived Beni, yet it seemed the only true way to act. I will tell thee of it. One very hot afternoon, about a year ago——"

Gopal told of the pedlar of sixteen spices, and how he had pretended to be cured by them.

"That", said Dasu, "is a just example of what I mean. Thou art happy to have come to this knowledge so young. The truth was that Beni loved thee and wished to aid thee in thy distress. Whether thy pain went of itself matters not. He had the will to cure thee, and for this thou owedst him gratitude. The lie would have been that he was thy servant, that he was importunate, that he did thee no good."

Happy with his new friend, Gopal walked by the river in the dusk. A few belated bathers could be heard shouting. From a man in a boat sweetly across the water a song floated. Dasu narrated the story of Odysseus and the Cyclops:

"And the monster screamed with pain. 'No-one has blinded me,' he bellowed, 'No-one has put out my eye'. The other monsters laughed. 'He is demented', they cried, and jeered at him, not knowing that the wily Odysseus had told the monster that his name was 'No-one'. But Odysseus still had to set free his followers so——"

By the time Dasu had finished the story they were nearing Gopal's home. An uneasy feeling had been growing in Gopal's mind. When they came to the end of the street he realized fully what it was. He did not want to enter alone by the gate next to the tamarind tree.

"I will consider this matter of the tree devil," said Dasu, as

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they came to the gate, "and I will tell thee what should be done."

He went with Gopal right up to the central arch, unwittingly relieving his nervousness.

"I shall see thee in a few days, Gopal. Pleasant sleep to thee."

Indoors the lamps were lit. Gopal's father sat reading. Tiny green insects swarmed over the base of the lamp at his side.

"Where hast thou been, Gopal?" he asked.

"Walking by the river with Dasu, O father."

"That is the boy of whom thy second uncle told me, is it not? The son of a learned man. I am pleased to have thee keep such company. But it is getting late now. Go to thy bed."

Pleasantly tired by his walk, Gopal soon fell asleep; he was confident that Dasu would solve Beni's trouble.



Chapter Six

GOPAL'S mother had given him a present of some money to buy gold-fish. He already had several which he kept in a large earthenware bowl, but he always wanted new specimens. The old Chinese who sold ornamental fish had a great variety, some with tails and fins larger than their bodies, hanging like silken drapery, some translucent, so that their bones and delicate inner structures could be seen, and some distinguished for their strange colouring, among the latter being yellow-gold fish, pink fish, tiger-striped fish, and multi-coloured fish, besides the more common red-gold kinds. Gopal had set his heart on the newest arrival among them, which was a fantail of brassy yellow picked out with jet black.

He was looking for Beni to go with him to fetch this prize. He found him in the large field at the back of the house, chopping wood. Bundle was there too, playing at motor-cars. Seeing Gopal he stopped making his motor noise for a moment to shout:

"There is to be a wedding. There is to be a wedding."

Then he ran off swiftly, his hands clasped before him, emitting a very loud 'Bur-r-r-r', representing a car of great power.

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"What wedding? Who is getting married?" Gopal shouted after him.

Bundle turned in a wide circle and came back.

"At our house. Sister-jewel is getting married. O feasts and fireworks. Getting married. Getting married. Getting married."

He rushed away again, chanting and being a motor alternately.

"Come back, Bundle," Gopal called, "come and tell properly. Whose elder sister is getting married?"

Skilfully avoiding imaginary obstacles on the way, Bundle returned and at last come to a stop, very much out of breath.

"Cousin Kamala who lives in great aunt's house is getting married. All the cousins are coming to stay with us. There will be a feast. Great joy!"

Here was good news. None of the boys was much interested in a wedding for its own sake, but when there was a wedding there was always plenty of excitement and amusement, as well as specially delicious food to go with it. This would continue for some days. followed by the crowning point, the great feast with two or three hundred guests, even the beggars sharing in the overflow of hospitality.

When Beni had finished his work, he and Gopal set off for the goldfish seller's, leaving Bundle to proclaim his good news to all who had not heard it. On the way they talked over the coming wedding.

"We shall make fireworks," said Gopal, "and there will be musicians. How pleasant it will be."

"True, it will be pleasant, but it will also be hard work for us, the servants."

"But, O Beni, thou wouldst not prefer to have no wedding?"

"Agreed. The more weddings the better," said Beni, who usually contrived to get as much amusement as possible out of any occasion of gaiety.

When they arrived at the stall of the Chinese they found a group of bazaar boys, standing well out of his reach, tormenting the old man. Over and over again they sang their song:

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Uncle Chinee, as I feared,
Someone has pulled thy father's beard.

But whenever, in an access of temper, he darted out to catch them, they slipped away in all directions screaming with laughter. Gopal and Beni came up just as he was making another sortie. Thinking he had at last caught two of his tormentors, he grabbed them.

"Now I have you," shouted old Li-pen, "what a terrible beating you will get. What awful tortures I will prepare for you."

"But, O Li-pen, we are customers," protested Gopal, "we have come for that yellow and black fish."

"Forgive me, O Gopal," said Li-pen, releasing them at once, "I though you were two of those wicked boys who pester me all the time. I was too angry to recognize my young friend. Come, let us look at the fish."

The bazaar boys had gathered again and began to sing, but Beni was ready for them.

"Uncle Chinee, as I——" their leader started, and stopped suddenly, his breath knocked out of him by a well-aimed clod of earth.

Old Li-pen smiled. The bazaar boys made a few further efforts, but Beni had by this time collected a good supply of clods and his aim was accurate. Each time they started singing Beni and Gopal opened fire. Some of them began to collect lumps of earth and rubbish to retaliate, but, catching sight of the red turban of an approaching policeman, they changed their minds and wandered off to find other amusement.

"That is well done," said Li-pen, "they have been annoying me all the morning. Now I know how to keep them away. I will collect a supply of missiles to discharge at them whenever they approach."

"Let us now see the fish," said Gopal.

"There is something new to-day, and most beautiful," said Li-pen. "Behold! Three moon-fish."

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In a small bowl swam three discs of silver, like three little moons that had fallen into the water.

"They are three bright rupees," said Beni, "three rupees that have come alive."

Some time was spent in admiring these and other beauties. At length old Li-pen put the yellow and black fish in an earthenware cup filled with water.

"This you wish to buy," he said, "but, as you have both helped me to-day, I add to it a gift. One of the moon-fish is yours. It shall be called 'Moon of Happy Fortune'. Now we shall drink tea."

The rest of the morning was spent sitting on the floor of his stall, drinking tea and talking of the world. And the Chinese had many tales to tell.

"We have a wedding to come," said Gopal as they walked homeward, "and we have a 'Moon of Happy Fortune'. This is lucky. Uncle Li-pen is a good man. I shall go to China when I am older. It must be a strange and wonderful country."

During the next few days the house was filled with preparations for the wedding. Even second uncle's servant occasionally relaxed his usual silence to utter a few saturnine jests to Beni, as, aided by hired labourers, they fixed a marquee on the flat roof of the front building.

Numbers of relatives began to arrive, and every morning more and more children were to be found, playing in the gardens and field, falling in the pond, or merely running round in droves, shouting. Gopal and Beni were in continual demand, to suggest games and provide such necessities as kites, string and marbles, while Bundle and Chenu had introduced the delights of "motor-cars" and "fishing" to the youngest children. The fleet of human motor-cars kept up a deafening "Bur-r-r", the smallest child of all bringing up the rear; he was a baby not yet two, clad in a piece of string with an ornament hanging from it, but his earnest concentration, as he plodded along spluttering and dribbling, outdid the efforts of all the others.

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In the evening the chief attraction was an ugly old hunchback. He was a connexion of the family, who had come from Kalna to join in the festivities. The children would all gather round him to hear his marvellous tales of gods and magicians, giants and princes. From his misshapen body came a voice so harmonious that all were enthralled. And his tales were of two kinds, the heroic legends and those that he gave as his own experiences. The children preferred these, for they were not only as full of wonders as the legends, but comical too. They could always tell when the most ridiculous parts were coming, as his expression would become terribly serious:

"So I said to the ten tigers—I told you that they had ears as big as winnowing fans—I said, 'O princes, if you make me into curry, that would hardly be enough to give you one mouthful each, besides which I am very unsavoury meat'. But the cruel tigers said, 'We do not mean to curry you', at which I began to thank their highnesses—'Not to curry you, but to bray you in a mortar with tamarinds and sugar and limes and peppers to make us a delicious chutney; and when we next eat elephant curry we shall have man and lime chutney to go with it'. And that, my children, is what they did to your poor cousin Kalyan. Since then I have been sour and sweet mixed, which is what good chutneys should be. Do I not speak truth?"

"No, cousin Kalyan," said Gopal, "there is no sour in thee, thou art all sweet."

"All sweet. All sweet. All sweet," said Bundle.

"How didst thou escape?" asked Amal, who came over every day with Asok from eldest uncle's house. "Why did the tigers not eat their chutney?"

"The tigers made one mistake," said Kalyan, "a mistake that many people make. They prepared their sauce before they had caught their meat. While they were hunting the elephant for their curry, thy cousin slipped out of the mortar, all covered with sugar and tamarind as he was, and a little bent, but not much, and ran away into the jungle."

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"Kalyan ran into the jungle," said Bundle, laughing for joy, "and the tigers had no dinner."

"And now you must all go to your beds," said Kalyan, "tomorrow night I will tell the story of the Monkey Barber."

"No, cousin Kalyan, tell us one more tale to-night. Tell us again of the Frog King."

"I will tell the shortest tale I know. At least, it is not a tale but another of my adventures. When I was in Burma I was walking one day by the lakes. Suddenly a great storm arose, but it was not a storm of rain. No, my children, it was a storm of sugar pellets, like this." Kalyan stood up and from a large packet scattered a shower of sugar pellets over his audience. With shouts of delight the children scrambled for them, while Kalyan walked quietly away.

Soon the great day came, the day of the wedding itself. The musicians, who might well have been exhausted by their efforts of the two previous days, put forth their greatest skill. The fervour of their playing was only exceeded by the astonishing manner in which they applied themselves to the food and drink in the intervals. "Watching the musicians eat" became a favourite amusement with the children.

Carriages drew up under the stone arch throughout the day, and when occasionally a palanquin was borne through the gates, the children would form up behind it singing the palanquin-bearer's song:

Here comes the palky. Look out! Beware!
Way for the carriage that floats on air.

Until after dark guests continued to arrive, and lamps had been set by the gates and round the drive to guide them in. A great hum of talk came from the marquee on the roof, and all the rooms of the front building were full. Many of the guests wore necklaces of scented white flowers, and the children were clad like flowers, in shirts of pink, blue, and yellow silk.

Cross-legged in long rows the guests sat on the clean-swept

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floors, in front of each was a large banana leaf for a plate, and some earthenware cups. If the house had been lent the horn of plenty for a night there could have been no greater quantity and variety of choice foods.

Some of the guests were so poor that normally they had only one meal a day, and that meal hardly worthy of its name. But to-night they could rejoice in rich food; indeed, their hosts made it clear that it was their duty to eat as much as possible, and then to start again. The large numbers of beggars who came for their share knew that they could ask it as a right in the sacred name of hospitality. And none was refused.

In the midst of the feasting and merry-making Gopal went apart for a while to walk in the field and breathe the clear air. The moon had risen, and the distant howling of jackals could be heard.

Kalyan was sitting on the low boundary wall. He seemed lonely and disconsolate. His shadow lay faint on the ground before him, the distortion of a man's shape.

"Shall we walk, O cousin?" said Gopal, taking his hand.

Hand in hand they walked in silence. Then Kalyan's step became brisker. He chuckled.

"Did I ever tell thee, O Gopal, how I once married a lovely princess. She was called Pearl of the Mountains, and her beauty was such that—not the rose nor the lotus, not the cedar nor the mountain torrent, not the famous sun himself, flushing at dawn the opal cheek of the sky, could compare with her. It happened one day that I was walking through the jungle, carrying my new umbrella when——"



Chapter Seven

IN the days following the wedding Gopal saw cousin Kalyan several times. He had decided to stay on in Calcutta for a few weeks' holiday, and often he asked Gopal to accompany him on his trips to various places of interest. Gopal was glad to do this, for Kalyan was excellent company; he had a continuous flow of merry talk, and delighted in arranging pleasant surprises for others.

On one of these occasions, when they were returning from a visit to the Temple Gardens, they stopped at a cook-shop. Gopal's father was not much in favour of his visiting such places, but cousin Kalyan went everywhere and spoke to all men. In a few moments he had the shopkeeper and his assistant smiling at his odd remarks. He bought two leaf-cones full of crisp fried grain, salty and spiced, and while they munched he kept his talk going between mouthfuls.

"Eating is one of the greatest pleasures. Do you know what the hawkers say when crying fried grain? They say 'he who does not buy repents, and he who buys repents—that he did not buy more.' See, even the pigeons hear my words and come to pick up the

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spillings. O pigeons, here is my hand filled. Take thy share. He is poor indeed who has nothing to spare for his brothers."

As Kalyan cast his handful of grain, pigeons assembled from all sides, greedily gobbling.

"Let men eat, let birds eat, let beasts eat. Then all is peace. O shopkeeper, this is a savoury grain. There is only one thing I like as well, and that is puffed rice fried in mustard oil with green peas and plenty of red pepper. In the rainy season, when the water rises knee-deep, I sit at home and prepare that delicacy in a large pan. Then the children come, and there is plenty for all. We beguile the time with old stories. We make paper boats and sail them. The ants and other insects climb on our boats to save themselves from the flood. So we have much harmless pleasure."

While Kalyan was speaking, Gopal recognised an approaching figure. As Dasu, for it was he, drew near, Gopal remembered their last meeting. In the excitement over the wedding he had completely forgotten poor Beni's troubles. And yet Beni himself had said nothing more of the evil spirit.

"Greetings, O Gopal," said Dasu. "I would have visited thee before this, but my father and I have been out of Calcutta."

"Greetings to thee, brother. Here, with me, is cousin Kalyan from Kalna, a great teller of tales, whom all men love. To-day he has taken me to the Temple Gardens, where we saw a wonder. There is a beautiful pool filled with all kinds of fish, and, when the man who feeds them raises his voice and cries aloud, they all come to the top, so that the water is filled with the heads of fishes."

Kalyan made a namaskar.

"Will you have a packet of fried grain. Be not afraid, the shopkeeper is a Brahmin. O shopkeeper, another packet for our friend."

Gopal wondered how Dasu would take this. He did not seem to be one who was accustomed to visiting cook-shops. But he accepted the packet, smiling an acknowledgment.

"As I had to leave the city in a hurry, I was unable to help in

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ridding Beni of his devil in the tree," he said, "but now I shall be able to do so, if he still fears it."

"He has not spoken of it since then," said Gopal. "We have had a wedding at my father's house, and with all the guests arriving I forgot about it. Maybe he too has forgotten."

"What is this talk of a devil in a tree?" asked Kalyan. "I am an expert on devils and bhuts of all kinds. Perhaps I could help."

Dasu told of Beni's belief in the demon of the tamarind tree.

"—I suggested that I should exorcize this devil, but it seems now that Beni has forgotten about it. I doubt whether it would be wise to revive it in his mind."

"It may be that like Gopal he has forgotten, or it may be that he still fears it but conceals his fear," said Kalyan. "Although I know little of Beni, except that he is a good boy, I would counsel that you do nothing unless he seems unhappy or speaks again of the matter."

"I think you are wise," said Dasu.

As they talked they sauntered on, skirting the bazaar, until they came to a stretch of open ground. Here they saw a crowd gathered round a road-side magician.

"Quickly," said cousin Kalyan, "let us miss nothing. Perhaps he is now doing the mango plant or the snake and mongoose."

His guess proved right, for even as they joined the throng the magician was declaiming:

"And now, generous patrons, I offer for your wonder and delight a thrilling fight to the death between a courageous mongoose and an evil snake. Before presenting this spectacle, however, I must pause. I say nothing, save that the open-handed manners of this neighbourhood are known as far as Benares and Bombay, nay further, in the lands across the black waters."

The spectators understood that unless they gave some money the show would not continue.

"Here's for thee, magician," shouted Kalyan, throwing a couple of pice on to the cloth that was spread on the ground.

A shower of pice and pies fell on the cloth.

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"I was not misinformed. I see that there are still generous people in the world," said the magician. "Behold now the great fight."

From a basket he took a snake and from a wooden box he released the mongoose.

The air grew tense. The mongoose seemed a weak creature incapable of dealing with the snake. Its snout wriggled as it sniffed about as though uncertain what to do. The snake heaved itself up slowly. Suddenly a shock of energy was released. The snake struck swiftly and precisely three times and each time struck home—to the spot where the mongoose had been a fraction of a second before. Then the mongoose moved faster than the eye could follow. At one moment it had just dodged the snake's fangs, at the next it had sunk its teeth in the snake close behind the head. The snake thrashed and beat about in vain. The little grey beast had become the incarnation of iron-jawed death.

Although the whole action had only taken a few moments, it seemed to the spectators that some considerable time had passed. The pace of their minds had quickened to the swiftness of the scene before them; so many movements had been crowded into the brief period that it seemed long.

With a horrible gusto the mongoose began to devour the snake. Dasu, Gopal and Kalyan turned away.

Gopal sensed that Dasu had disliked having to witness the performance, and that he hated to see even a snake killed.

"We men are ever thus," said Kalyan, "we love to watch a fight, provided that no hurt can come to us ourselves."

"He is dead," said Dasu, "so much power of life, a piece of perfection—and in a moment, dead flesh. The marvellous ant goes busily about its ways, my sandal strikes it, and it is only a smear on the ground. Yet it is foolish, I suppose, to grieve for the death of a snake. At every instant of time millions upon millions of creatures lose their lives, if one were able to mourn all these one would be more than a man."

"Thou art not mourning the snake, O Dasu, thou art mourning

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its beauty. 'Perfection', thou sayest, yet is not every snake as perfect. It is in the nature of the mongoose to kill the snake, therefore such a killing too has beauty. Even a man may see that this is part of a scheme. What I could not understand at one time was imperfection. Why was I, Kalyan, born a hunchback. As a child I was an object of mockery or pity. Then I determined that it were better to die, than to live as an insult to perfect creation. One day I was playing with some of the village children. In my desire not to appear clumsy beside the others, I excelled all. I outran and outleapt them in every game. But, instead of being envious, they praised me with gladness. 'See,' they cried, 'Kalyan is the best runner. Let him be captain of a side.' From that time I exerted myself at play and at work and from being an embittered boy I became more kindly. Now I am old, and in my home place all men are my friends; to the children I am 'Cousin Kalyan', 'Uncle Kalyan', 'Father Kalyan'."

"Thou art a happy man," said Dasu, "thou hast the art of making pleasure from all the chances of life. To all men thou givest a friendly word, that I see though I have only this moment the happiness of knowing thee. For me it is otherwise. In general, I prefer solitude to company, save such company as thine and Gopal's. For Gopal I have conceived a friendliness, but during the months my family has lived in this city I have made no other friend."

"That is because thou art not concerned about the doings of thy fellows. Those who are of thy manner usually resent also the interference of others in their own affairs. Men are of two kinds, those whose minds are turned inwards on themselves, and those whose attention is directed to the outside world. The latter are usually happier. If a man's mind is turned inward in speculation or philosophical thought there is no harm in him, but beware of the man who plots for his own profit. He will counterfeit affability to all men, while seeking inwardly some means of despoiling them. If, like myself, he joins every crowd, it is not in keen interest to see what is going forward, but rather to attempt some

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pilfering in the crush of people. Now to which of the two kinds of men does Gopal belong, O Dasu?"

"He is a mixture, but I think he is more like me than like thee. How sayest thou, Gopal?"

"Sometimes I enjoy company, sometimes I enjoy being alone. But I am always glad to be with friends and kindly people."

"He has spoken a true word," said Kalyan, "for kindly people are the friends of all men. They carry with them an exhalation of goodness, which is perceived by those who come near them as if it were a perfume of sandal wood or jasmine."

"Thou art such a man," said Gopal, "are not all people glad to see thee?"

"Gopal, thou art young. I speak not of such as myself, who am no better than any poor fellow to be seen in the bazaars and streets, I speak of saintly men, men renowned for their virtue. But this talk cannot interest thee. Now, for thy pleasure, I will narrate the true story of the man who wrestled with elephants."

Dasu and Gopal were entertained by the mirthful and extraordinary incidents of this tale until they reached the gates of "my father's house". Gopal's father himself was standing at the gate.

"Greetings, cousin Kalyan," he said, then, turning to Dasu, "and you are Gopal's friend, the son of the learned man, are you not? Greetings to you. Gopal, where have you been? Seeing the sights?"

"Kalyan and I have been to the Temple Gardens. It is a most beautiful place. Afterwards we met Dasu, and saw a snake and mongoose fight."

"Come within, my friends," said Gopal's father, "come and take some refreshment, and I will tell of an experience of mine in connexion with the Temple Garden. Gopal, let Beni bring some sweets, especially those of milk and pistachio nuts, also iced water."

When these had been brought, and the guests were sitting at their ease, he began :

"Some years ago a certain good man of this city had amassed a great fortune by his dealings in precious gems."

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Kalyan's eyes started to twinkle; seeing which Gopal's father turned to him, smiling.

"I see, cousin, that thou art diverted at the idea of a good man amassing a fortune. This, however, is not completely impossible. The man of whom I speak afterwards became my friend, and I can maintain from my own knowledge that he was charitable to the poor, kindly disposed to the world, and without harm to man or beast. Doubtless the princes and rich men who bought from him had to pay well, but it did them no harm to hand over some of their superfluous wealth to one who could dispose of it more wisely. Be that as it may, once possessed of his fortune he wished to use it for some worthy purpose. He decided to build a temple, the most beautiful possible, for the men of his community. Whether he succeeded or not, you have seen. First he built the main temple of hard stone. It has three frontal arches canopied with marble. A wide sweep of marble steps leads up to a portico which extends into a verandah of fretted marble, fine as lace. Within, the floors are tessellated, and the roof is supported by carved columns of stone. There are three shrines, the inmost being that of the deified saint who was one of their prophets. Then the surrounding gardens, embellished with Indian and exotic plants, and an ornamental lake, were laid out."

"We saw the lake", said Kalyan, "and were struck with wonder at the fish, which all came to the surface at the call of the keeper."

"That is not, after all, so strange, when we consider that these people slay no living thing, not even a mosquito, and use all creatures with kindness. The very rats will come to them to beg food.

"When the work was completed, though entry to the shrine was confined to those who were of his religion, my friend threw open the gardens for all men to enjoy. I myself have often spent a pleasant evening there reading or contemplating the lake.

"Three years ago when, after a long and useful life, my friend had reached his eightieth year, he was smitten by a painful illness. For some months he endured it with fortitude, but at last he knew that his time had come. He called his two sons to his bedside

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and told them his last wish; it was that his body should be cremated in the place he had loved best in life, his own Temple Gardens.

"He knew, and his sons knew, that there would be difficulties to be overcome. There is a strict law that only the burning ghats set apart for that purpose may be used for cremations. Moreover, a certain faction, even among the men of his own religion, raised objections when they heard of his wish, despite the fact that the temple and gardens were his gift. Perhaps it was because by this time he had lost the greater part of his wealth, but for some reason opposition arose on all sides. Ah! Kalyan, thou art laughing at me. Thy meaning is that even if a good man can gain wealth, in the end he will lose it merely because he is a good man. It may be that thou art right.

"In this state of affairs the sons sent for me."

Bundle and Chenu had approached quietly, and were standing in the doorway, holding hands.

"They sent for third uncle," Bundle whispered to his brother.

"They asked me to secure permission, by any means whatever, for their father's wish to be granted. The next two days I spent interviewing officials all over the city. I went from one to another without pause; everywhere I met with a refusal. I knew that by this time the old man must be dead, for the doctor had said that he could not live more than a few hours, and already two days had passed. On the morning of the third day I decided that the only thing left was to see the supreme authority in the city. To him I went and told the whole story. He considered for some time. At last he consented.

"I returned with all speed to my friends' house. As I entered I met an old servant who had been in his service since boyhood.

" 'The master still lives,' he said, 'has your honour succeeded?'

" 'I have succeeded,' I answered, 'the gods be thanked.'

"While we stood there, the elder son came out through a door.

" 'My father has just passed away,' he said.

"It was at the very moment that I had entered the house. My friend had been waiting for me."



Chapter Eight

Cousin KALYAN was going back to Kalna. During his stay in Calcutta he had made many friends, and his departure took on an almost ceremonial air. A crowd had assembled by the fish-pool to see him off. The little children surrounded him, running to clasp his hand and touch him, very loath to let him go. Dasu came, bringing a fresh-scented garland of *bel* flowers, which he placed around Kalyan's neck.

"My children," said Kalyan, "although I go now, it is only because I must seek further adventures to relate to you when I come again. Surely you would not have Kalyan left with no stories to tell, and no news from distant parts to bring?"

"Stay, Kalyan, beautiful Kalyan," said Bundle.

"Do not leave us, O Kalyan," cried the children.

"I must leave you. Who will tend my plot of land if I stay too long from home? I cannot impose on my good neighbours for ever, they have their own work to do; and Moti, my cow, will become lonely without me. If she is stricken with grief she may give no more milk. What should I do then for my butter and curds? And the children and neighbours at home, might they not

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say 'Kalyan has forsaken us for his rich relatives in the city, he has become haughty and grasping, he will never come to us again.'"

All the children broke into laughter at the idea of a haughty and grasping Kalyan.

Then, as often happens at leave-takings, there was a long pause. No-one knew what to say next. A figure clad all in white walked slowly through the gates. It was eldest uncle. With the aid of a long staff he still bore himself upright in his dignity, for all his great age. The assembly made a respectful salutation, the younger ones approaching their hands to his sandals and passing their fingers across their foreheads, meaning that they put the dust from his feet on their heads to show their veneration. Chenu and Bundle went beyond the formal gesture, picking up real dust from the ground and rubbing it energetically on their faces, until the old judge stopped them.

"I hear, O Kalyan, that thou art returning home to-day," he said, "and I am come to wish thee a good journey. Travel is a great provoker of thirst, so I have sent round a basket of fruit. See! Here are my brothers bringing some food and fruit to sustain thee on thy way."

Gopal's father and second uncle approached, one carrying a basket, in which were some mangoes, a branch clustered with lichis, and a pineapple, and the other a large parcel.

"Our wives have cooked for thee some special sweets; there is also curry and hand-bread," said Gopal's father. "Eldest brother has sent this fruit. It remains only to wish thee a safe arrival home. But, Kalyan, think of us, and come again soon; there is none more welcome in our house than our cousin from Kalna."

When all farewells had been said, Kalyan set out with Gopal and Dasu, who were to accompany him to the railway station.

"Was it not great honour for me", he said, "that the judge himself came? There is a good story for the neighbours at home. And here I walk garlanded with flowers, with my friends. How much happiness there is in the world."

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"I believe that thou takest pleasure in travel," said Dasu. "Is this not true?"

"Indeed it is. What is more pleasant than to see fresh places, to make new friends? Were I a rich man I would travel over the wide world, seeking great wonders, learning the ways of strange peoples. Between my journeys I would return home. Thus would I have two pleasures, the pleasure of venturing forth, and the greater pleasure of coming home again to my own place."

"Thou art deserving of riches, for in thy hands gold would be a blessing instead of a curse. Gladly would I see thee set off on a voyage across the world, taking with thee thy message of friendship to all men. But it seems that gold is essentially evil as it falls, save by accident, into the hands of wicked men. And the wicked get no real enjoyment. By travel they learn naught; seeing in the ways of other peoples only matter for scorn, imagining their own customs, however foolish, to compose the only right course of behaviour."

"That is in some measure true," said Kalyan. "Many who travel leave their minds at home. A born traveller, however, will find means to achieve his object somehow. Even if confined to one town he will go every day to his work by a different road; he will search out whatever is remarkable in the surrounding country; especially he will cultivate the friendship of men in every walk of life, hearing with sympathy their opinions, learning from all with humility. For my own part, I make my journeys as entertaining as possible. Thus, when I learnt of the wedding, I set out from home a week before the appointed time. I came by bullock-cart, by tonga, by palanquin, and on foot. I was able to have talk with many men and women. Should I travel that way again, I have friends."

"Thou hast scarcely the need to make friends in advance," said Dasu. "Are not all men thy friends within a few moments of meeting thee?"

"Not all. There are many good people everywhere, especially among the poor. But some men are too proud to talk to a hunch-

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back. O Gopal, thinkest thou that, if I buy fine raiment, these will acknowledge my salutation?"

"Whoever does not return thy greeting is a bad man," said Gopal.

As they walked on, they passed a shop bearing a large wooden sign in four languages; the largest letters were English and spelt the word *OPIMUM*.

"Cousin Kalyan, what is sold here?" asked Gopal. "What is opium?"

"It is a drug. It takes away the senses, and so it makes men heedless of the world's miseries. Tell, O Dasu, for thou art a wise boy, tell Gopal of the other thing sold here."

"Opium is a costly drug," said Dasu, "but there is another called ganja, which is cheap. Many millions of the poor never have enough to eat during the whole of their lifetime, but ganja is cheaper than food, and it stops the craving for food. A few annas will buy enough to take away the desire for many meals. The poor give it even to children to stop their crying for food, it brings sleep and forgetfulness, and in the end—death. The fat-bellied ones say, 'What can be done with such creatures as these, who debauch even their own children?' But, while they cry out against these unhappy men, they do nothing to help them to get enough food, rather do they wring from misfortune profits and taxes, so that they can add one more piece of gold to their hoard, a token of a hundred lean corpses. But let us not on the day of Kalyan's departure speak of sad things, which he and I know too well, and which thou shalt learn. Come, Kalyan, make us gay again."

"Alas! How can I be gay when we remember the misery of our brothers. But I will tell a tale to show how the worshippers of gold punish themselves.

"There was once a rich miser, who was so mean that he could not bear to spend money even for his own needs. Each day, as he smeared the clarified butter on his hand-bread, he bewailed his lot. 'Woe is me,' he cried, 'this reckless waste of good butter

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is like rats gnawing at my hard-earned wealth. I am ruining myself by my greed.' Each day he ate less and less butter, until with his bread he took only one little grain as big as an ant. But even this seemed wasteful to him, so at last he hit on a plan. From a nail in the wall he hung a pot of butter, and before eating each piece of bread he would point it at the pot saying, 'Good butter to my good bread.' Thus he continued for some months, well pleased. But, one day, as he sat at his solitary meal, a new thought came to him. 'How greedy I am,' he said, 'to eat each day twelve cakes of bread. I could live well on eight.' From that time he lived on eight. So it went on until two pieces of bread a day, with plenty of water, made all his meals. His sack of gold grew fatter and fatter, and he became leaner and leaner.

Then a fever attacked him. He had already become so weak through starving himself that in a few days he died. His son, who had been estranged from him years before, came from a distant town. He inherited all the store of wealth. Now, like butter in the noon-day heat, the gold began to melt, for the miser's son was a man of pleasure. He passed his days in gambling, drinking, and sumptuous entertainment. But, in common with many of his kind, he was a generous man. If in the midst of his feasting some poor debtor of his dead father's came, begging for time to pay the iniquitous interest that day fallen due, and expecting only to have all his goods seized, the son would cry, 'What do I care for usury or for thy miserable property. Here are some silver coins, take them and go. Forget not to call a blessing on my head.' And many, indeed, blessed the reckless son who had cursed the pitiless father. When all the wealth was dissipated, the rich man's son was reduced to working with his hands for a meagre living. Then, to his surprise, for he had formed a low opinion of men among the parasites and harpies who had surrounded him in his wealthy days, he found many friends. The poor people, whose debts he had so carelessly forgiven, remembered his kindness. When he needed food, their houses were all open to him. And he was still a merry companion, for he never bemoaned the past.

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He lived quite happily in his new state, for riches or poverty were all one to him. So we see that a rich man may live more poorly than the poorest, and a poor man who has many friends is rich. As the old usurer was hated by all, so the generous son was loved, despite his faults, and they were many and grave."

With the end of Kalyan's story, the three companions came to a vast pontoon bridge spanning the river on the further side of which was the railway station. The snorting and puffing of steam engines, interrupted now and then by the shrill blast of a whistle, formed a continuous background of noise against which the deep moan of a siren on an ocean-going liner sounded like some gigantic animal giving tongue.

"My father and eldest uncle would not like this place, with so many machines," said Gopal.

"But there is a sight to please them both," answered Dasu.

Gopal and Kalyan laughed as he pointed at a sacred cow, which was lying in an indolent attitude across a tramway line. Behind it a tram had halted, and the driver, in a frenzy of impatience, was clanging his bell and cursing the cow. A crowd of loiterers, supporters of the cow to a man, shouted advice and criticism, obviously not meant to be helpful.

"The cow is tired," yelled one, "lift her by the horns into thy carriage and take her with thee. Thou wilt acquire merit."

"Turn back thy car and return it to its mother, the Tramway Corporation. Refrain from using strong language to the unoffending cow."

"Go to the bazaar and buy some plantains. Then entice the cow away from thy tram. This would settle the dispute on friendly terms."

"Make thy tram go round the cow. What prince art thou that all should give way before thee?"

At last the tram-driver dismounted from his platform and with some difficulty pushed the recalcitrant animal out of the way. The tram started off amid groans and jeers.

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"The machine may carry all before it," said Kalyan, "yet it seems that we can still put some obstacles in its path."

"But, O Kalyan, thou art thyself about to travel by rail," Gopal objected.

"Alas! That is the trouble with machines. Once they arrive, they compel all men to use them, even thy father. Verily they are a disease."

They crossed the bridge and entered the station. Inside was a great crowd of people, some encamped on the floor among their baggage, some hurrying to and fro, and others standing or walking about in a leisurely way as if they were present only to see what was going forward.

One group consisted of an old woman, a young farmer and three children.

"When is thy train, mother?" asked Kalyan of the old woman, at the same time breaking off clusters of lichis from the branch in his basket and giving them to the children.

"When it pleases the gods. I and my son and my three grandchildren have sat here since sunrise. No doubt there will be a train some time, and there is one who of his kindness will come to warn us. But we have much diversion sitting here watching the railway station. In our village there is no such wonderful sight, and the entertainment is free."

"I wish thee a good journey, mother," said Kalyan, "and a safe arrival home."

"It seems to me," said Dasu, as they walked away, "that it would be more convenient for travellers such as these to find out the day before when they should start."

"Not at all," said Kalyan, "there I cannot agree. Observe that the people here are of two kinds. Some hurry to and fro looking at watches or clocks. How worried they are! *There is no peace on earth*, their faces declare. Now see the others. They have no watches, nor do they care for clocks. They are serene, like the old woman and the farmer, who regard all this bustle as a raree-show."

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"But what of those who hurry because they are busy men?" asked Gopal.

"There is no business worth running for. Whose work is important, the farmer's and the peasant's, or that of the thousand and one makers of trinkets, and by trinkets I mean also bioscopes, tram-cars and newspapers. What need has the farmer of a clock? Does not the sun rise in the morning and set in the evening? But I talk too much, I must hurry to buy my ticket."

Dasu and Kalyan started laughing. At first Kalyan seemed puzzled, then he struck his forehead and roared with mirth.

"What a foolish old man is thy cousin, O Gopal," he said. "Be warned by me, for if ever I judge the actions of others, I find I am judging myself. Come, then, let us walk in a leisurely and dignified way to the ticket office."

Having bought his ticket the hunchback found a suitable compartment. A compartment in which among the occupants were several children, ranging from a baby in arms to a boy of eleven. With many smiles, apologies, and jests, he carried in his packages.

When at last the time came for the departure of the train, two children already sat in his lap, while the rest pushed and scrambled around him; the baby watched him steadily.

"Come again, beloved Kalyan," said Gopal, as the whistle blew.

"Surely I shall come," answered Kalyan, and then to a boy who tugged at his garland of flowers, "Patience, my young prince, wait until the train starts and I will tell the remarkable tale of the golden leopard and the forest where rubies grow on trees."

"Give our greetings to Moti, thy cow," called Dasu as the train drew out of the station.

"I shall do so, and perhaps she will send thee a present of some curds of supreme flavour," shouted Kalyan from the carriage window.

Gopal and Dasu watched the train out of sight, then slowly turned and went from the station.

"When he goes," said Dasu, "it is as if in a room someone had put out a lamp."

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"Always men rejoice at his coming and grieve at his going."

"Would that the same were true of us all. Didst thou remark, Gopal, how thy young cousin Bundle called him 'beautiful Kalyan'. Those who are without perception would think this to be irony, yet the child saw straight to the truth. It is only at the first moment of meeting Kalyan that one notices his ugliness, soon one forgets it in his gaiety and friendly welcome, then he becomes admirable, and at last beautiful, for his beauty is in his generous smile and his simple good will."

"May the gods protect him," said Gopal, and they continued on their homeward way.



Chapter Nine

THE silver disc of the fish floated on the surface of the water. It was dead. Old Li-pen's gift, which he had named "Moon of Happy Fortune", would shine no more among its golden companions. Gopal was sad. He felt as if some fragment of good fortune had left the world. He dipped his hand carefully into the earthen bowl and lifted in his palm the minute corpse. Limp and lifeless, it was still a miracle of perfection. He would cast it, he decided, into the fish pool, where its spirit would be at ease.

By the pool he found Beni, who also seemed downcast.

"My Moon of Happy Fortune has died," said Gopal, "the little fish that Li-pen gave, which thou didst say to be a rupee come alive."

"That is bad luck! I too have suffered a loss. I cannot find my amulet, which guards me against evil spirits. Unless I find it by nightfall, the devil in the tree may work me some harm."

"Do not fear, O Beni, did not my father tell me that there are no devils."

But, even as he spoke, Gopal remembered the evening when

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he had walked by the river with Dasu. He remembered that he had been afraid to pass the tree alone at night. He had been relieved when Dasu had come with him right into the house. Sadly he looked down at the tiny dead creature in his hand.

"Go in peace, little bringer of good luck," he said, casting it far out into the middle of the pool. Still it floated on the surface of the water in the sunlight.

"Surely it is possible for thee to buy another amulet," said Gopal to Beni as they walked away.

"It is; but it would not be so powerful as that one, for that one was written and sealed by a most holy man. The vilest demons feared it. I must search everywhere to find it again."

The day seemed ill omened. Although the cold weather should have begun, there was a dry heat in the air, arid and menacing.

As they stood at the gates, Beni pointed to a yellow house standing alone a little way off.

"There dwell others who are unhappy to-day. The husband of the woman who is thy friend lies on his death-bed. But let us not weep. Now I have to go to my work. Perhaps I shall find my amulet. Perhaps our neighbour will recover. Perhaps Li-pen has more moon fish for thee. And let us not forget to-morrow night. There will be great festivity."

The minutes fell, one after one, and disintegrated into an eternity of heat. During the whole afternoon, beneath the slow cadence of the sun, Gopal watched the yellow house. He was afraid. In that house, seemingly deserted, a man lay awaiting death. A smell of ashes and corruption seethed and sank in the parched air. Gopal spat. A darkness of grief was in his mind; grief not for the man's approaching death, but for himself. He dreaded the days to follow, the wailing of the women. Day after day it would rend him; the man's widow would shriek her loss. She would become a stranger, she who was his friend.

Once, when he had been spinning his top near the yellow house, the door had opened, and she had beckoned him. She had led him into a great room, cool and shadowy. At the far end of

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the room she had shown him a cupboard in which were delicately wrought trinkets and images of the gods. There were many gods, but most awful was the goddess Kali. Her shapely jet-black body was flecked with the crimson of blood; she wore a necklace of skulls.

"O brother," the woman had said, "these are my treasures that thou seest. They are beautiful, are they not? See my golden anklets, how heavy they are, and these my gods and goddesses. Yet there is one thing more I wish to possess. I have heard that the craftsmen from China make a wonderful globe of ivory, carved as fine as lace, and that, having carved one globe, through the holes in the pattern they carve another separate globe within it, and then within that another, and so on to the inmost globe which bears the same pattern yet is no larger than a lentil. It has also come to my ears that thou art familiar with the market where they sell such beautiful work. Go, then, and buy for me an ivory globe. See! Here are ten rupees. It should suffice. Try to bring me that which I desire, and earn my gratitude."

The next day Gopal had made his adventurous journey. He had in the past been only twice to the quarter of the Chinese shops, and then in the company of his father, but these two trips had been so much discussed with his friends that he had the reputation of being perfectly familiar with that part of the city. But now, going alone, his venture had seemed full of hazard. It was in the days before his friendship with Li-pen, and he felt almost like one going out to a foreign land. Gopal, however, was a boy of determination. He had spent an enjoyable day seeing many new sights. At evening he had returned bearing an ivory globe of such workmanship that, had a man devoted ten years of his life to the making of it, he might well have been content that his time, which could have been wasted in idle commerce, or fighting with his neighbour, or quarrelling with his wife, had been well spent.

In the morning he had taken the globe to the yellow house. Proudly he had shown his task accomplished. The woman had been overjoyed. From that day she, a childless woman, had treated

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Gopal with great kindness. Many presents of money for tops and kites, and many fine mangoes and green plums he had received from her. Now she was far away. Her dying husband had dragged her with him to the confines of death. She was remote from the everyday world of the living. Gopal sobbed, and in the darkness of his imagination a flame flickered, by the light of which ghostly marionettes presented formally the scene of a minute cremation. The thick waters of the Ganges floundered in the background. A funeral pyre built as if of twigs sent up a tenuous feathering smoke, and in the orange light the dead man's relatives stood around. As the flames rose higher about the corpse, its belly began to swell. Gopal retched in disgust and horror. One of the marionettes picked up a wooden club. He whirled it in the air and brought it down on the dead man's skull, which cracked with a sound like that of a cough. Gopal relaxed into a gush of tears. He ran from his watching post out to the fields behind the house.

Throughout the next day Gopal was haunted by his vision. In the afternoon he went for a long walk, wandering for hours by the river. Suddenly he came to a halt. It was growing cooler. The impending death had driven all other thoughts from his mind, even the fact that this was the day of days. The day of the fireworks in honour of the festival of Kali. For weeks before the children had been making fireworks. Cones of earthenware had been stuffed with a mixture of iron filings, sulphur, and charcoal, made by Gopal according to old Abdul's method, pushed home with a wad of paper and sealed with moist clay. Rows of similar fireworks could still be seen at some houses, where they had been drying in the sun ready for the night. Chinese crackers in bundles had been bought. At this moment the women of the house would be filling hundreds of little earthenware saucers with sweet oil and floating a wick in each. These were for the lamps, rows of which would outline every wall in the neighbourhood. Gopal turned about and began to hurry homeward. The day was drawing to its close. The ghost of a moon and a solitary star were poised in the sky.

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When he reached the field behind the fruit garden, a crowd of people had already gathered. Asok and Amal and their friends were lighting the lamps, which were placed in ranks along the top of every wall. Chenu and Bundle and the younger children were running around shouting and letting off paper sparklers. As darkness closed in the rows of lamps twinkled more brightly, giving an air of enchantment and expectancy to the scene.

Beni carried a Chinese cracker as big as a candle into the centre of the field. Alight, it spluttered for a moment, then exploded with a great noise, like the crack of a gigantic whip. The night had begun. Amal lit one of the earthen cones. A flaming tree showering coins of golden fire grew up to twice a man's height. Before it had died down two more were flowering. Youngest uncle set a whole string of little Chinese crackers going at once. There was a stream of pops and bangs. Fiery wheels whirled in space. Rockets sprayed their starry arcs across the skies. The rise and fall of the golden stars, the joyful cries of the children, and the sharp reports of the crackers soon assumed a set rhythm, a monotony of joy seemingly set outside time. At last the store of fireworks began to fail. The golden cloud dispersed. Only the largest earthen cone remained. With a mock-heroic speech, Gopal's father set light to it. Like a peacock's tail its golden plumes spread themselves alone and splendid. It attained its full glory, and with unexpected suddenness it subsided. The earthen pot glowed a dull cherry-red on the ground; its life was over. Beni kicked it aside. It cracked with a sharp report.

All the children except Gopal had gone to bed. He walked slowly through the door in the wall into the fruit garden. He could hear the soft breathing of the cows and vainly tried to see them. He walked round under the stone arch and out at the gate near the fish pool. Beneath a street lamp, a bazaar boy was showing something in his hand to a friend. They were the only people in sight. There was a confidence and arrogance in the lift of the boy's head. He struck a match and applied it to the object in his hand. It shot swiftly upwards burning with a brilliant apple-green

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light. It was not a rocket ; it was some new kind of firework. The two walked away and Gopal was left blinking at the red shadows.

Out of the shadows came a wailing note, a mechanical cry of grief. Death had visited the yellow house while the light burned in the sky. It seemed to Gopal as if the chance passing of two boys had lit in the sky a signal of death. The keening voice reiterated its cry. With each succeeding utterance, more and more the emotion of real anguish swelled the formal phrases. Far into the night Gopal lay vigilant and terror-stricken.

In the cupboard in the yellow house, beautiful as a panther, the blood-bedabbled Kali stared malignantly into darkness. Beside her lay the ivory globe, enclosing another and another and another, each a replica of itself, continuing in implication to the most minute globe at the centre and outward to embrace the whole universe.



Chapter Ten

THE cool weather came at last. The scalding summer and the monsoon, succeeded by an unnatural spell of dry heat, were past. Now was the best of the year.

Gopal walked briskly one morning along a lane by an old white wall over which hung tangles of foliage. It was an unfrequented lane, and held for Gopal a certain mystery, an odd atmosphere created by the high wall, by the thickly clustering branches and leaves overhanging it, and by the silence that lay beyond the wall. He had often walked that way, but never had he heard any voice or the sound of any movement. The flat grey roof of a house could be seen from the distance. Was it a deserted house, and, if not, what manner of people lived there that they were never seen or heard?

"Gopal."

He stopped dead. His name had been whispered so softly that after a moment he began to think that he had imagined the

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sound. He looked up and down the lane and glanced along the top of the wall. There was no-one in sight. Nothing stirred. He started off again.

"Gopal."

He was startled. Now there could be no doubt. Someone was calling him in a whisper. Again he looked rather uneasily in every direction.

"Gopal."

This time his name was shouted. He turned quickly. Dasu's smiling face appeared among the greenery above the wall.

"Is thy hurry so great that thou hast no time to greet friends?" he asked. "How is it possible to pass one who offers a gift of rose-fruit?"

Dasu held out a handful of little pink fruit of the apricot kind, which exhaled a scent like that of a rose. Gopal reached up and took them.

"These are delicious," he said, biting into one, "and I am grateful, but why didst thou wish to startle me by hiding?"

"Because", said Dasu, "this is a mysterious place. The deserted lane, the silent house, did these not lead thee to expect something out of the common? I supplied the need—a voice calling thee in a whisper—a ghostly echo. Admit, Gopal, that thy thoughts were running on spectres and inhabitants of the underworld."

"Certainly I was a little frightened. But so many frightening things have happened lately. It is as if some bad influence were at work."

Gopal went on to tell of his neighbour's death, of his own vision and terror, of the dead moon fish and Beni's renewed fear of the tree demon, and of many other things, trifles in themselves, but all combining to give the impression of some unhappy influence at work.

"We all have this experience," said Dasu. "A succession of unlucky chances and we feel ourselves haunted. It is, however, only as the tossing of a coin. Let heads be good luck and tails bad

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luck. If we have a long succession of the coin falling tails every time, as happens in the normal run of chance, we feel there is some supernatural interference. In the house that lies yonder lives a cousin of mine. He is a student of natural matters of a kind that many think to be supernatural. He cannot walk, owing to an injury received in his youth. Alone in his room he spends his time studying what are usually known as occult sciences. There is no-one else in the house but an old man who does his marketing and housework. Let us go to him, for he has few visitors and is glad to see young people."

"Is thy cousin a—sorcerer of some kind?" asked Gopal rather hesitantly.

Dasu laughed.

"Not of a kind to injure thee, though he has strange powers. Come and meet him."

He helped Gopal to climb the wall. Together they pushed their way through the dense foliage and out to the wide untended gardens that lay about the house. Silence encompassed them. They passed an empty stone shrine, ancient and weatherbeaten, and walked towards the grey house.

As they drew near Gopal saw in the distance the figure of a slim young woman. She walked swiftly along the terrace and disappeared round a corner.

"Didst thou not say that thy cousin lived alone with only a manservant?" he asked.

"Yes, quite alone."

"And yet I saw a young woman. I think I saw a beautiful woman walking on the terrace."

"No," said Dasu quickly. "It is impossible, There is no-one at all. Do not let thy imagination create people where none exist."

He led Gopal into the house. The room in which Dasu's cousin sat was filled with books. Bookshelves covered the walls right up to the ceiling, and he was surrounded by volumes of all sizes.

"See, cousin Ganesh, what I found in your garden," said Dasu.

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"I pulled him over the wall. A boy named Gopal, who thinks this is a sorcerer's house."

Gopal saw before him a man not yet old, but with white hair. His expression was gentle.

"A sorcerer's house!" he said. "Then we must not disappoint him. What shall I do, Dasu? Shall I conjure hither a pair of silver gazelles, or would you even wish to see the unique bird of Arabia?"

"Gopal is prepared for anything. Were you to change yourself into a tortoise he would barely be astonished."

"That, I fear, is not within my power, but if thou art willing to help me we may provide thy friend with some small diversion. Look into my eyes, O Dasu. Look well."

As Dasu stared into his cousin's eyes his expression became trancelike.

"Now, Dasu," said Ganesh, "thou art no longer a boy of fifteen years, thou art an infant of two."

Dasu's whole demeanour was suddenly changed. He looked round wonderingly, caught sight of a bright bowl of brass, and wandered over to it in a ridiculously unsteady way, holding his hands out to grasp it.

"Pretty," he said, smiling round at the others.

His voice had been transformed. Not the most accomplished actor could have achieved a more perfect imitation of a little child.

"Enough of this," said Ganesh. "It is time to grow up. How quickly life passes away. How fleeting is the age of man. Already thou art an old grandfather, a venerable greybeard."

It seemed to Gopal as if his friend's face had in a moment become wrinkled. His shoulders were bowed. He moved slowly and with care.

"How is your health, respected one?" asked Ganesh.

"One must not complain," answered Dasu in a grave voice, again quite unlike his own. "I have the consolations of philosophy, and these, my books."

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"Come," said Ganesh, clapping his hands loudly, "thou art thyself once more, cousin Dasu, and my books are still my own."

Dasu smiled at Gopal.

"Was I laughable?" he asked. "Did my cousin make me become a roadside entertainer or a chanting beggar?"

"Neither," said Gopal. "But he is a true sorcerer, for he made thee into a little child and then into an old man. This is not like the conjurers, whose feats are deceptions such as second uncle has often explained and shown to us, it is a great wonder."

"Not a great wonder," said Ganesh, "it is merely a part of the nature of man not commonly understood. Anyone almost could learn the art, provided that he could inspire the belief in others that he had power. Yet the knowledge of this art has its use, for example, in taking away certain kinds of pain. It is possible to perform a number of surgical operations without any suffering to the patient. These things, however, are but the simplest of my studies, and the secret is known to many men. My further research has been not unfruitful. I will explain so that you, who are children, may understand, and perhaps help in an experiment. My problem is to cause happenings in the outside world, without using my body in any way. The most obvious start is to influence another mind. In the little performance just now, I caused thee, O Dasu, to behave in unwonted ways; but, and here lies the flaw, in order to do so I had to use my own body first, my eyes and my voice, in persuading thee to act in such and such a manner. Moreover this occurred during an entrancement, so that thou hast no memory of the events. Now I propose something more difficult. We three shall sit quiet for a few moments, and see if what I desire comes to pass."

Gopal waited in nervous expectancy, but some considerable time passed and nothing happened. Feeling cramped, he stretched his arms, noticing at the same time that it must be near sunset, for an orange-gold light shone through the doorway behind him lighting up the walls of the room. He remembered, with a start, that it was still morning. Before he could make any remark, the

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light became lilac tinted, changed rapidly to blue, then apple-green, and finally to silver. The whole atmosphere was charged with a shimmering brilliance. He heard the distant stroke of a gong. At once everything resumed its ordinary aspect.

Dasu's cousin looked enquiringly at him.

"Did anything out of the way happen?" he asked.

"Indeed it did. The room was lit with many beautiful colours, not coming from outside, for I turned to see. All the air, and the books on the walls, and the ceiling, all changed colour."

"Was there no sound of music?"

"No music, only a gong-stroke. Then the colours went."

"Now, Dasu," went on Ganesh, "thou art the judge. Did I make any movement or say any word?"

"No, cousin, you sat motionless."

"And yet I willed thy friend to see these colours. Also I willed him to hear music, but there I failed. With the gong-stroke that ended the demonstration I succeeded. So far it seems I can only suggest illusions of one sense at a time."

"I also saw the colours," said Dasu, "but faintly."

"That shows that my powers are increasing. Formerly I could only work on one person, and then without uniform success. Soon I shall be able to suggest illusions of all senses at once. Then I shall set out to control animals by the power of the mind, indeed, in a small way, I have already been able to make a beginning, for I can at will cause certain wild creatures to approach me. The greatest step, however, is control of inert matter. If, one day, I can on a chessboard move a piece from one square to the next, using no intermediary between it and my mind, I shall have accomplished a great feat. To persuade a number of men that they saw it done—that were easy, but to do it in fact—I wonder—is it possible? Mind can control mind, but can mind control matter, other than the thinker's own body?"

Gopal and Dasu went out by the way they had come. As they were about to pass through the trees to the wall, Gopal looked backward over his shoulder. Away beyond the house, in a far

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corner of the garden, he saw the woman, looking towards them.

"Quick, Dasu," he said, pulling his friend by the shoulder, "there is the woman. Dost thou not see her?"

But looking again he himself saw her no more.

"I think I saw something moving," said Dasu. "I do not know what."

"It was a woman, as I said before, a woman young and beautiful."

"There is no woman in that house, nor has any entered it since my cousin came to live here, and that was many years ago."

They passed from the bright silence of the garden into the trees and shadows, climbed the wall and let themselves down into the deserted lane.



Chapter Eleven

SERENELY the days of the cold season flowed on, each bringing its small pleasures. Gopal's sad mood left him, and again he woke every morning full of zest for whatever of interest the day might bring. He had feared lately that some calamity lay in wait for him, that there was some mishap which could not be avoided, but now he felt that, as Dasu had said, it was only because a few trifling misfortunes had happened to follow on one another. And he laughed and he played until the morning when, looking for Beni to tell him of his plan for an expedition to the river, he could not find him. He went to ask his father.

"O father," he said, "I cannot find Beni. I have not seen him all the morning. Has someone sent him on an errand?"

"No, my son. Beni is sick. He has a fever and has gone to his mother."

"Is he very sick? Who will heal him?"

"Do not ask too many questions. I am sending a physician to him. But remember, Gopal, thou art forbidden to visit him. I

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order this not from lack of feeling, but because I would not have thee succumb to the same sickness. I hope he will be back with us in a few days."

Now Gopal's fears returned filled with power. Here, then, was the disaster. Surely Beni would die. His friend, for such he was in truth, and only by chance a servant in his father's house, his loved friend would be gone for ever. He would become a voice heard no more, a dwindling memory, a handful of ashes scattered over the river.

"Do not let him die, father."

"Die! Who talks of dying? Dost thou die every time thou ailest. Do not fear, Gopal, in a week at the most Beni will be here again stronger than before. This afternoon I go to see him and I will bring thee news. I will give him thy good wishes, and send, as coming from thee, such delicacies as an invalid is allowed."

But despite his father's reassurances Gopal remained in deep misery. When Amal and Asok came to call on him a little later, he was at some pains to compose himself and welcome them.

"We have had luck," said Amal. "We found a tree bearing sweet berries, and gathered enough to fill a banana leaf. Come, Gopal, let us share them." And he began to divide them into three heaps, counting, "One for Gopal, one for Asok, and one for me. One for Gopal, one for Asok, and one for me. One for Gopal, one for——"

When he had finished there were two berries over. He did what all boys do when this happens. "Those are for the dead man", he shouted, and threw them over his shoulder. As they fell to the ground, the thought passed through Gopal's mind—"Beni's share; now he has only what is left over for the dead man."

"Thou art downcast, Gopal," said Asok. "What is it? Some lesson to be done, or is thy father angry?"

"No! Beni is sick. He is suffering from fever."

"That is sad news, but soon he will be well again. Last year both Amal and I had fever, and when we were recovering we

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had great pleasure. No one scolded us, and grandfather gave us many presents. One of them was the magic lantern with coloured slides. We must have a show with it again. Let us do it to-night. Come to our house, Gopal, and let us make a party."

"Yes. Come to us," said Amal, "and I will ask grandfather to let us stay up late."

His cousins were so pleased with their idea that Gopal did not wish to seem churlish by refusing, although his concern for Beni made any party of pleasure distasteful.

"It is settled then," said Asok. "He is coming to-night."

In the afternoon, when his lessons were over, Gopal determined to see Beni. He knew that his father would be angry if he found out, but his anxiety for his friend was too great for him to wait. As his father was also to visit Beni, he himself would have to go quickly and leave early. He set out at once.

The poor quarter where Beni's mother lived consisted of a number of huts built on an open space of ground.

Arrived there, Gopal asked some children where he could find Beni.

"The one that has a fever?" asked a boy. "Do you mean that one? He is gravely sick."

The children led him to a hut.

Beni lay on a string bed, and his mother watched over him. Endlessly turning and muttering, he had no ease. His lips were encrusted. His expression showed only fear. A pitcher of water with herbs steeped in it stood beside the bed.

"Do not fear. O Beni." When Gopal spoke, Beni clutched at his hand.

"Why should I not fear? Did I not tell thee of the tree demon. Now, at last, thou seest. When I lost my amulet he struck me down. I shall die. O mother, I shall die."

A shadow fell over the three. In the entrance to the hut stood a tall figure.

"What is this? Beni has a little fever, has he? Did I hear talk of demons? Boys, this is sheer folly. Demons do not exist, and

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never have existed. If there were in truth such beings, I should soon drive them to the remote places to which they belong. But as there are none, I will proceed to conquer this trifling ailment by means of science."

Second Uncle had heard of Beni's sickness only a short while ago, and had at once set out with his medicine chest. This for him was an opportunity too good to be missed.

"Here is the only magic for curing fever," he said, opening his case and selecting one from among the many bottles and tubes within. "Quinine! The greatest magic of all. Come, Beni, swallow two of these tablets. I can promise thee speedy relief."

He compelled Beni to take the two pills. Then he gave the tube to Beni's mother, who waited, silent and anxious, beside him.

"He is to have two more this morning, and then to-morrow—but no, I myself must see this done properly. I shall come again to-night. Keep the boy warm. Pile garments over him. Make him sweat. Remember, I am coming again. I shall see that he is recovered in a few days. Have no fear, O woman, all will be well."

Bustling and important, second uncle packed up his bottles, clicked his dark spectacles, and departed.

"O Gopal," Beni moaned, "sometimes everything becomes too big. The hut is too big for my head, it will burst through. The wicked demon has conquered. Try to find my amulet, or else I must die."

Gopal whispered words of comfort, but, when he left, Beni wept in his weakness.

On his way home Gopal again saw Second Uncle.

"I returned to find thee. How is it, Gopal, that thou hadst gone to Beni's hut. Did not thy father forbid thee? This fever is catching. See to it that thou goest not there again, or there will be severe punishments."

"O Second Uncle, I was much concerned for Beni. But I hope that thy medicines will cure him."

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"Well mayest thou hope. Unless I mistake greatly, he will be cured in two or three days. Fever demands one thing only—Quinine. It is infallible. And I have my own special methods. Look, Gopal, what is that?"

He pointed dramatically at a wayside shrine, on which lay offerings of *bel* flowers, incense and vermillion.

"That, my boy, is Superstition, cloudy foolishness that bemuses the mind. But this," and he tapped significantly his medicine chest, "this is Science which frees us from sickness and woe, up-roots pain and labour, showers on us benefits and plenty, and makes fruitful the barren parts of the earth. Science is the wisdom of the future."

Having left his uncle, Gopal went to seek Dasu. He found him at home, and told him of what had happened.

"Beni is more troubled by fear than by his sickness. If I could find some way of removing his fear he would be happy."

"True, Gopal, for though thy uncle's quinine may cure fever, it cannot cure fear. In passing, quinine can hardly be said to be one of the gifts of his great god, Science. It has been used by various tribes and from the most ancient times, as indeed, have many of the famous remedies."

"What did Beni mean when he said that things were too big?"

"It is an illusion people have when they are feverish. I have had it. As Beni said, it makes one feel as if the proportions of the surrounding scene had become enormous, too great for the human mind. I have called it an illusion, but I suspect it to be more than that. I think that fever sometimes gives an increase of perception, even to the point of beginning to realize another dimension."

"What is that, Dasu, another dimension? What is any dimension?"

"There are three that we know—height, length and breadth. We live in a world of three dimensions, but we can conceive of worlds of two or one. Imagine a line of no thickness stretched out in length, that would be one dimension. A world of two

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dimensions would be like the surface of a great sheet of paper, but without the paper's thickness. Such a world might be inhabited by creatures having only length and breadth, but no height. They could not by any means imagine a solid world like this, for the idea of height would be unknown to them. They would be flat shadows moving in a flat world.

"But there is nowhere a flat world?"

"That we do not know, but we can imagine one; our minds can conceive of one. But suppose, Gopal, that there were a world of one dimension more than ours, then the inhabitants of that world would be to us, as we would be to those of a flat world. They could look on us from outside. If I were to plunge my arm into a flat world, its inhabitants would only perceive that section of it that cut into their world. When my wrist entered, they would say, 'Here is a small oval being of a strange kind.' When my forearm entered, they would say, 'Here is a larger being, round but similar to the oval being in most ways.' Now a problem that has puzzled many men is this: the whole of the substance composing a man's body changes after a number of years, seven is, I believe, the number, so that seven years ago I was made up of a completely different assembly of flesh and bones from myself of to-day. And one's mind is continually changing, even from moment to moment. What then is it which thirty years hence will enable people to say, 'This is Dasu,' for both my body and my mind will be different? When I was first introduced to the idea of worlds of varying numbers of dimensions, an idea struck me. If our real beings were in a world of four dimensions, why should not we in this world be merely three-dimensional sections of our four-dimensional selves. Then, as in my example of the flat world, where at different times my arm might be perceived by its inhabitants as two distinct but similar beings, I, whether at the age of one year or fifty years, would still be a section of the four dimensional entity that is Dasu. I should die when that entity had passed completely through the world of three dimensions and away, just as, if I removed my arm from the world of

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two dimensions, it would disappear for its inhabitants, though still existing in our solid world."

"It is very difficult to grasp, but surely I am always myself?"

"I hope so, Gopal, for that is a good self to be."

"And what of Beni? Canst thou not do something, for thou art wise, having knowledge of dimensions which I cannot even begin to understand?"

"Surely we shall do something. To-morrow I will make a ceremony of driving out the devil in the tree. Then we shall tell Beni that there is nothing left for him to fear."

In the early evening Gopal set out for eldest uncle's house. On the way he met some children of the neighbourhood who had also been asked.

"Greetings, Gopal," said one. "What is this magical lamp we are going to see at the house of Asok and Amal?"

"It is a lantern which makes pictures on the wall, coloured pictures of green and red and yellow light, showing scenes in far-off lands. You will like it."

"Let us hasten, then, for I am eager to see it, and besides there will be meat puffs and sweets and fruit drinks. That will be good."

There was quite a stir at the old judge's house, Amal and Asok having availed themselves fully of his permission to ask a few friends. "A few" had been liberally interpreted as a good two dozen noisy children, who were now clamouring for the show to begin. Only one boy was silent, a fat cousin named Rabin, who sat in a corner methodically devouring meat puffs one after another, and washing them down with great gulps of fruit syrup and water.

"Come, Rabin," called Asok, "all is ready for the show. Now, alas for thee, refreshments are ended."

"I come," said Rabin, gathering five or six more meat puffs from a tray. "I can go on eating while I watch."

"Even in an earthquake," whispered Amal, "cousin Rabin would 'go on eating while he watched'."

Laughing, the children crowded into the darkened room where

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the show was to be given. An unearthly smell like the concentrated essence of a sack of garlic pervaded the room. It came from an acetylene lamp which Asok had just charged.

"Do not pay heed to the smell," he shouted, "I will get the lamp alight in a moment, and it will die down. Take your places in rows on the floor."

There was a brilliant flash of white light, then the magic lantern was closed. The garlic smell became fainter, but it was joined by a smell of sizzling paint. Asok placed a slide in the wooden carrier, clicked it in, and a square patch of mingled colours appeared on the wall. He twisted a screw; the patch of colours took on sharp outlines. A mountain scene appeared, with snow and sunshine, and six little men in pointed hats trimmed with fur about to ride on a sledge. There was a buzz of wonder and pleasure from the audience. A click—the six men were hurtling down the mountain side. Another click—the sledge had overturned and the little men were covered with snow. The children laughed and applauded.

"What is all the white stuff?" asked Rabin, with his mouth full.

"It is frozen rain, for in those parts it is very cold," said Asok. "I have seen snow in Simla. It falls like small pieces of cotton fluff and collects on the ground. In the country shown in the picture the mountain sides are always covered with snow, even when the sun shines."

"It is something like ice-cream," said Rabin, contentedly munching another puff. "Imagine whole mountains covered with ice-cream. I like nothing better than ice-cream."

The children were still laughing when the next picture appeared on the wall. It was a mechanical slide, showing a fat man with his mouth wide open. Asok turned a handle, and it seemed as if the man were devouring pieces of coal, bottles, bits of wood, and old tins.

"Who is this?" asked Amal.

"Rabin," shouted all the children.

But Rabin himself went on munching, not in the least put out.

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Then followed the adventures of a man called Gilpin, whose horse ran away with him. A dozen slides went to showing the extraordinary mishaps that befell this unlucky man. When Asok came to the end of the entertainment, he put on another mechanical slide. This showed a pattern made up as if of jewels, dissolving and turning as he turned the handle.

"It is just like the image tube that Beni gave me," said Gopal.

It was quite dark when the party of children who were going the same way as Gopal, started homeward. He left them at the end of the road, and between that point and the front gates he made up his mind.

He walked straight in through the gates by the tamarind tree. As he passed by it the whole surface of his skin prickled with fear and the moisture left his mouth. He walked on to a shed in the fruit garden, and took from within it a heavy chopper. Then he turned again towards the tree.

He walked with a mechanical and trancelike step right up to the trunk. Hanging the chopper over his shoulder by the cord through its handle, he began to climb. His breath came in shuddering gasps, and the sweat coursed down his body. At last he reached the branch of the demon. Then, with such fury that he himself might have been the demon, he began hacking at the branch. A gigantic fruit bat, which had been resting nearby, flapped slowly across his face. Gopal cried out softly, and went on hacking. Suddenly the branch broke off and fell crashing to the ground. It was rotten. There was a flurry of croaks from the disturbed crows, then silence. In the light of the rising moon, Gopal clung to the tree, limp and chilled with his own sweat.

"Well done, Gopal, bravely done," said a voice from below. "I, too, had come for this purpose, but thou art beforehand."

Dasu stood looking up at Gopal, an axe in his hand. Gopal climbed down and stood beside him. All was still and quiet in the house. Evidently no-one had heard the crashing branch. For a while they stood in silence regarding the tree. It was picked out in moonlight and shadow, an etching in silver and jet.

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"Come, Dasu, let us burn this rotten branch," said Gopal, at length, picking it up carelessly.

They carried it through the fruit garden and out to the field behind. Gopal fetched a light from the house. The dry wood flared up fiercely. In a few minutes it was consumed. Gopal beat it to dust with a stone.

"That is the end of Beni's tree devil," said Dasu. "Now thou hast still the pleasure of telling him."

"I must go now. Come with me, Dasu. Otherwise he will have no rest to-night."

They hurried off into the quiet streets. When they drew near Beni's hut, Dasu waited and Gopal went on alone.

"I wish to speak to Beni," he whispered into the entrance.

Beni's mother, who sat awake by the bed, was startled, but recognising him, beckoned him in.

"Beni, hearken, O Beni," he said in an urgent voice. "The demon is fled. I climbed the tree. I cut down the branch which was his dwelling, and burnt it to ashes. I beat the ashes to dust and trampled them down. Now thou hast truly naught to fear."

"I cannot believe it. None would dare to climb that tree. Not even in daylight."

"I climbed the tree, Beni, and at night."

"I saw him do it, and I saw him cut down the branch and burn it," said Dasu, who had followed on and now stood outside the entrance.

"O Gopal," said Beni, smiling at him, "he is gone. He is gone at last."

In a short time he fell asleep. Gopal withdrew his hand from Beni's clasp without disturbing him, and, followed by the blessings of the sick boy's mother, he and Dasu started for home.

"Now I must get in without being seen," said Gopal, as he took leave of Dasu. The house was quiet in the moonlight. Gopal slipped like a shadow under the jasmine arch and taking off his sandals entered noiselessly and made his way up the stone stairway to his bed.

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In the morning he could hardly believe his deeds of the night. He went to the tamarind tree to reassure himself. There for evidence was the jagged gap in the trunk, where the branch had been. Now, in the sunlight, he saw the truth. The rotten branch of a tree had menaced Beni and himself for months because their imagination had given it that power. But reason had been useless in banishing the demon; it had needed an effort of will. The effort being made, reason had returned. The supposed dwelling of an evil spirit became a rotten branch and nothing more.

Gopal's heart was filled with gladness. At last Beni was released from fear. He would recover, surely he would recover very soon. When second uncle returned from a visit to Beni, Gopal's hopes were fulfilled.

"Now, my boy, learn what quinine can do for fever. On this day, the day following my first treatment, he is almost well again. To-morrow or the next day he will be up and about. Always remember, Gopal, that, in cases of fever, quinine is the sovereign remedy. Also one must make the patient sweat. For the best results he should take a bath and immediately wrap himself in woollen rugs, then swallow the tablets. While I do not pretend to have knowledge of obscure diseases, for such common complaints as fever my medicine chest is all-sufficing."

Soon after Beni returned. From that time on he had no fear of devils and bhuts.

"I have found my amulet," he said to Gopal one day, showing him the little hexagonal tube of copper. "Now that, thanks to thee, I have no need of it, I have found it. It was lying beneath one of the guava trees, covered with green rust. I have polished it, and I shall give it to some man who fears devils of the imagination. Thou and I, brother, know that such things do not exist, but some there are who fear them greatly."



Chapter Twelve

“GOPAL, hast thou seen it in the great field? They have been building since early morning—as big as a house,” said Bundle, running up in a state of great excitement.

“Big as a house,” echoed Chenu, who followed him, riding astride a length of bamboo as if straddling a horse.

“Yes, it is made of wood—poles of wood and rope.”

“What is it?” asked Gopal.

“This great thing as big as a house. They stick the poles in the ground, and they tie other poles across. It is very high. Tomorrow night something happens there. A man said it is like stories such as the elders tell us. I think it may be like cousin Kalyan’s stories. Those are fine stories.”

“O Beni,” called Gopal, seeing him come out of the inner building, “what is it in the big field that Bundle has seen?”

“It is the theatre. Thy uncle gave permission for them to hold it this year in our field. It comes every year to the neighbourhood.

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I am going, for I have heard there is much to be seen. The entertainment goes on all night."

Gopal, accompanied by Bundle and Chenu, went through the fruit garden to the field at the back of the house. Some workmen had finished erecting a scaffolding, and were now putting on the walls of the temporary theatre. These consisted of large numbers of stiff oblongs of lath filled in with wattle, and were lashed to the skeleton structure of poles to form a kind of giant marquee. A number of local children had already gathered to watch. Gopal and his cousins joined them. There was much argument and speculation as to the nature of a theatre.

"The men, who are called actors, stand up one after another and tell stories," said a child. "As soon as one man finishes his tale another begins a fresh tale."

"No!" said an older boy. "It is much more than that. You shall see the whole story put before you as it happened. There will be men in jewelled robes, such as emperors wear, and they will take all the parts and speak in the guise of the heroes and gods of the epics. I, who tell you this, have seen it myself. It is a wonder to behold, for, with the powerful lights and the beautiful costumes, you can believe that you are witnessing in truth the deeds of the princes and sages of former days."

"I must come to-morrow night," said Gopal. "I shall ask my father."

"For thee it will be easy, Gopal," said another boy. "The children of thy family will be given the best places free. The theatre is on the land of thy people this year."

"I shall come, too," said Bundle.

"And Chenu must come with Bundle," added Chenu.

"But, if it is late, youngest uncle may not permit——" began Gopal.

Chenu began to weep noisily, and Bundle looked as if, but for his younger brother's presence, he too would have wept.

"Weep not, Chenu," said Gopal. "No doubt, if all the others,

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Amal and Asok and I, beg leave, thy father may allow thee and thy brother to come with us to the early part of the show."

"No doubt he will allow it," said youngest uncle, who, unknown to the boys, had been standing behind them for some minutes. "No doubt he will allow it, if his son will refrain from making a noise which recalls the time when the calf strayed and the cow kept us awake through the whole night. Cease this vile noise, Chenu, for I do not like moaning children. Thou shalt see the show and Bundle, with Gopal and the others."

Chenu and Bundle smiled contentedly, clasping their father's hands, one on each side.

Two or three itinerant vendors of food and drink were prospecting the site, for there was open access to the field from the road running along the far side. They were offering their wares to the workmen and children, and at the same time enquiring about the possibilities of a good trade on the following night. Youngest uncle called one of them over. He bought white candy of pulled sugar for all the children, then, finding he had no money with him, had to send Bundle running to fetch some from the house.

The pleasure of the children in watching the theatre built before their eyes, while they ate candy, was supreme. When, in the afternoon, the last piece of the roof was lowered into position, applause sounded from all over the field. As far as the children were concerned, this was the end of the first, and not the least important, act of the entertainment.

Gopal, passing through the field next morning, found an even larger crowd of children than there had been the day before. Asok and Amal had heard of the theatre, and come over with some friends.

"Come and join us, Gopal," called Asok, "we have been acting plays. The theatre is empty, and we have been playing inside."

Together they entered. Within the marquee were some boys declaiming and attitudinizing with great enjoyment.

"I am a seven headed devil with teeth like the tusks of an

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elephant," shouted Amal, hurling himself into the centre of the group.

"Kill him. Kill the devil. Cut off his seven heads," shouted the others.

In a moment the roped-off arena in the centre of the marquee was filled with a struggling mass of boys. Shouts and cries of defiance sounded continuously.

"Here I come," yelled Asok, jumping on top of the wrestling group. "I am the demon's older brother. I have seventy heads and in my mouth a forest fire."

When they were all exhausted with their new sport, Gopal set off with Amal and Asok to accompany them home. He left them at their gate, and after making arrangements for meeting in the evening, continued his walk alone. It so chanced that on his way back he passed near the house of Dasu's cousin, Ganesh. He had already walked beyond the end of the lane that ran beneath the high wall, when he paused. Curiosity made him turn back. Nothing stirred along the lane. Not a tremor moved the twining foliage that hung down over the white wall. Gopal looked up, expectantly almost, when he came to the spot where he had met Dasu on his last visit. He remembered that Dasu had helped him to climb the wall, and began to consider whether he could get up there unaided. It was a higher wall than he had ever yet climbed alone. There was small foothold.

He began to climb. He slipped several times, but, at last, he managed to clamber up high enough to grip a ropelike creeper. In a few moments he was sitting astride the wall. With the aid of the creepers it was easy enough to let himself down inside. The leaves and branches were by nature so thickly pleached overhead that only the dimmest light filtered through. He waited until his eyes accustomed themselves to the green twilight, then he stepped forward cautiously, conscious that he was trespassing, and in a house where strange things occurred.

The silence around him was suddenly broken by the sound of someone approaching. Gopal crouched back, but, before he

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could hide, the new-comer pushed aside a cluster of hanging branches and came face to face with him. To Gopal's relief it was a boy of about his own age who stood before him, and doubtless one who had no more right in the garden than himself. At first he seemed as much taken aback by the encounter as Gopal, and they stood regarding one another, saying nothing.

"What dost thou here?" Suddenly the stranger challenged Gopal.

"No harm," answered Gopal, pleasantly enough, for he liked the face that confronted him, a face which seemed in some way familiar, though he felt sure that he had never met the boy before. "And thou thyself, what dost thou? Thou art, I think, a visitor come to see Ganesh, the cousin of Dasu, my friend, for I know that no-one lives here but Ganesh and his servant."

"That is not——", the boy began, then broke off suddenly in confusion.

"Here is a fine stick," said Gopal, bending down to pick up a straight stick free from knots, and so giving the other boy a chance to cover his mistake, whatever it might be. "This would be good for playing tip-cat."

"What is that—tip-cat?"

"Thou hast never played it?" Gopal was astonished. "All the boys play tip-cat. It is fun. Tops and kites are better, but tip-cat is simple. Sticks cost no money."

"Show me, then."

"We must find a smaller piece of wood, and a sharp flint."

Followed by his companion, Gopal soon found what he needed. He sharpened the two ends of the small piece of wood. He led the way out from the trees to the garden.

"Now, I lay the small piece of wood on a flat stone. I strike the pointed end with the larger piece, and when it bounds in the air I hit it mightily. So!"

The piece of wood went whirling through the air and landed not far from the ancient shrine. Gopal paced out the distance, counting aloud.

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"—thirty-two, thirty-three, thirty-four. Thirty-four paces. That is not a bad shot, though I can do better with a cat of heavier wood properly sharpened with a knife. Now it is thy turn. Try to beat my distance."

The other drew back.

"I do not think——" he began, falteringly. "It would be—difficult—for me. I have not played games——"

"How is this? Hast thou no friends? We are many boys in this neighbourhood, all friends."

"I have not many friends to play games with. That is—not here. I have no friends, in truth."

"No friends! I will be thy friend. My name is Gopal. What is thy name?"

"Also Gopal."

"Then it is a sure sign, for we two Gopals must needs be friends. And now it is thy turn, here, take the striker."

Still the other Gopal held back. Gopal, irritated, threw down the stick. Immediately the other picked it up.

"I will play. Please do not be angry."

He walked away to the flat stone, put down the sharpened piece of wood, struck it, and sent it flying through the air. Gopal ran up to him and again paced out the distance.

"Thirty-four paces," he shouted in surprise, "and it has landed at the same spot as my stroke landed. Thou art a beginner, and I have done it a thousand times. Surely thy eye and hand are quick. At all games thou shalt be a prince. I shall name thee Prince. Do not forget, I am only Gopal, but, from now on, thou art Prince."

"A lucky chance," said the boy, smiling, "but tell me what the other games are. What are tops and kites?"

"What are tops and kites! O Prince, thou art a jester, too. Is there any boy in the whole world who does not know what tops are and what kites are?"

"Yet I do not know, truly, Gopal."

"Tops are—no—it is too difficult. To-morrow, come to my

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father's house and we shall play with both. Stay a moment, here is another fine stick."

Gopal picked it up, then turned to his new friend in surprise

"It is the striker. Yet I thought it was in thy hand all the time. Didst thou drop it? But surely it was in thy hand just now. No matter. Come to-morrow, the way is thus——"

"But, Gopal, canst thou not come here again to-morrow?"

"Here! It is a good place for games, with none to interfere, but Dasu's cousin might object. We have no right here."

"He will not object. I will ask permission. Do not fail me, O Gopal."

"Do thou ask leave, and I will come. To-night—O Prince, I had forgotten—it is most splendid—to-night I go to see the actors. Come with me. All the children of our household are going. Come as our guest."

"I cannot. I am not allowed."

"Why not? It is very good to see the epics, the wonders of the gods and heroes. Thou shalt come, surely. It is in the great field behind our house. It is reached thus."

Gopal gave careful directions for reaching the field where the temporary theatre had been erected.

"Do not miss this splendour," he said, as they stood in the lane taking leave of one another. "It will be worthy of a prince, O Prince."

"I do not think I can come. But I will try, friend Gopal, I will try."

When, at last, evening fell the large field was utterly transformed. The children who played there every day could hardly believe that this magic-laden place was the ground so familiar to them. The noise and bustle of the assembled crowd, the cries of the vendors of food and drink, the flaring naphtha lamps, and in the centre the big brightly lit marquee, which would house the wonders of the night, combined to produce in all a feeling of pleasure and shared delight. It was to be one of the few nights

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that can be talked over and remembered with gladness for many months after.

"Now it is my turn," said Beni, stopping before an improvised stall. "Give eight pice worth, O vendor, for we are eight boys."

With him was a party consisting of Gopal, Amal, Asok, Chenu, Bundle and two visiting cousins. Each of the older boys in turn had been treating the others to the wares of the hawkers. The first stall had provided a savoury mess of whole lentils stewed with spices, a few scraps of meat being added as it was a special occasion. The next hawker had taken a lump of ice in a cloth, thrust a small stick into it, and beaten it with a wooden mallet, producing from within a round fan, as it were, of ice with the stick as handle. Eight of these, smothered with syrup, had sent the party on its way rejoicing and crunching with gusto. The stall-keeper before whom Beni had stopped was selling hollow balls made of ground lentils and spices, light as air. He pierced a small hole in each and filled it with a sauce of tamarind juice, sugar, and chili, before handing it to the customer, who received six for his pice. When all the boys had been served, Beni payed him two annas. Amal drew Gopal aside.

"Beni cannot afford to spend on us so much money," he said. Gopal agreed, and going to Beni tried to give him two annas in recompense.

"No, Gopal," said Beni, refusing to take the money, "to-night I am wealthy. This afternoon I helped the workmen prepare the inside of the theatre, and they gave me an eight-anna piece. Well may the money-lenders envy my gains. I shall spend this all to-night, for pleasure is rare and I can be thrifty on so many dull days."

"Well said, brother," called out the hawker. "Were it not for brave fellows such as thyself, where would the trade of we poor ones be? When there is a chance of rejoicing let all men be merry, say I, and would say so still, even if it were not my living."

While the boys jostled and laughed their way through the crowd, Gopal kept watching for the other Gopal, whom he had

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named Prince. But he had not seen him up to the time when a sudden stir went through the throng of people.

"They are going to begin," came the cry, and at once the whole crowd started to move towards the entrances to the theatre marquee.



Chapter Thirteen

WITHIN the marquee all was light and gaiety. Friends shouted greetings across the roped-off arena in the centre, where a small orchestra strove against the noise of the happy crowd; local wits vied with one another in making jests about recent events in the neighbourhood; popular figures were acclaimed by all.

"See, brothers," shouted one man, "a sight as rare as gold mohurs. Govind, the grain dealer, is smiling. What pleasure must await us when even the avaricious unbend."

"He is not smiling because of the players," yelled another. "No, he is smiling at the rupees he has amassed during the year by giving us short weight. But we are not so simple as he thinks; we know about the lump of clay stuck under the scales."

"That we do," answered the first, "and we know about the weights with a hole drilled in them, filled up with dirty wax."

Laughter and ironical cheers from Govind's customers did not discompose him at all. He waved to them and, still smiling, went to his place. He, at least, could afford to smile.

After a time there was a lull in the tumult, which the players seized as a chance to begin their performance.

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A cry of admiration went up from the boys, as a man in a golden diadem and bright robes strode into the arena.

The musicians played a pulsing accompaniment as the actor declaimed:

I am the herald of a warrior king.
To you the choice of war or peace I bring.
My left hand offers bounty, friendly words;
My right holds javelins and bloody swords.
And now, resplendent as the rising sun,
My master comes——

“No, brother, he comes not,” shouted one of the audience. “See, he has dropped his crown, and it has rolled among the crowd.”

There were loud laughs while those near the actor-king found the tinsel crown and handed it back to him, but the herald barely paused at the interruption——

My master comes, his thousand battles won.
In magic armour, he shall take no hurt
From spear, or sword, or——

the herald paused and pointed at the interrupter——

the offensive remarks of our neighbour in the
unwashed shirt.

A road of delight arose from the audience, while the interrupter, who wore in truth a very dirty shirt, slapped his thigh and grinned for joy. This was in the tradition of the old touring theatre, that the audience should interrupt and the players should answer them impromptu. Some of the more pretentious town players objected to interruptions, but now the audience knew that they could expect to join in the performance, and, more, to hear pointed verses about well-known local characters.

To a critical onlooker the show would have seemed poor enough, with its crude verse and tawdry costumes, but to Gopal and his friends all was a matter of wonder and delight. In the

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tragic parts there was complete silence, while in the humorous passages the audience laughed loudly and joined in with shouts of encouragement. The herald had soon established himself as a favourite, and his exchanges with the man in the dirty shirt aroused great enthusiasm, but when they both joined forces against Govind, the grain dealer, there was a roar that shook the fabric of the marquee.

The play had been proceeding for some time, when Gopal, chancing to look at the audience on the opposite side of the arena saw the other Gopal. Quickly he made his way to the back of the crowd and went round to find him.

"I am glad thou hast come, O Prince," he said. "Is it not worth seeing?"

"Surely, it is very fine. I had never imagined such a scene, and so many people."

Then Gopal's attention was distracted for a moment by a neighbour addressing him:

"Greetings, Gopal, art thou so filled with pleasure at the entertainment that thou art praising it aloud? Thy manner was as if speaking to someone beside thee."

"I was speaking to my friend here, whom I call Prince," said Gopal. He paused in astonishment, for, as he turned again, he saw that Prince had gone—whither he could not tell, yet there had been no time for him to walk away.

"He has gone. I must seek him at once," he said, and began to search among the crowd. He made his way right round the marquee, but could not see him. By this time most of the children were leaving; it was growing late, and they could not stay until the end of the performance, which would go on through the night.

"It will soon be time for thee to go in," said youngest uncle, who was taking home Bundle and Chenu. "Do not stay too late, Gopal."

"I go soon, but I must speak to a friend first. There he is! He is leaving. I will catch up with him and then return home."

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While talking to his uncle, Gopal had caught sight of Prince walking out of the marquee.

"O Prince," he called, running after him, "I have been searching for thee everywhere. Why didst thou leave me so suddenly?"

"I ask pardon, friend Gopal. It was not through lack of friendship that I left, but because—it is—difficult—it is difficult to explain."

"I cannot understand. There is something strange about thee. If we are to be friends, why make mysteries?"

By this time they were walking along the road which passed by the side of the large field remote from the house. A burst of laughter from the marquee sounded distantly now, and, turning a corner, they continued in silence under a maze of stars.

At last Prince spoke.

"I will tell thee a part of my story, Gopal; but swear first not to speak of it to any living person, not even to thy most loved friends."

"I swear, O Prince, and if I speak falsely may evil demons slay me," said Gopal eagerly. "It will be a secret between me and thee."

"Leave aside demons, Gopal, but let my tale be forgotten as soon as I have done speaking. Know then that Ganesh, the cousin of thy friend Dasu, is my father, and that I live in the house with the white wall. I have never played with boys of my own age, and that is why I am still ignorant about tops and kites and other playthings, although in some matters I have knowledge beyond thy conception. Thou art the only boy I have spoken with in all my days, and for this, and because thou art friendly, I do not wish to lose thee. As thou hearest, even my manner of speech is different from thine, for thou speakest, I judge, as other boys speak, while I speak as my father speaks. I would learn from thee to speak as a boy, and to play as a boy should play. Therefore, I beg thee to come to visit me in the garden whenever thou wilt."

"I shall come to-morrow, surely," said Gopal. He felt drawn towards his namesake, partly by friendship, and partly by the

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mystery of his life, a mystery without any touch of the sinister or malign, even perhaps emanating from some good influence, or calling out to a kindness in Gopal himself. He made to take his friend's arm. Immediately he had an odd sense of bewilderment. Turning to look, he saw that the other had drawn away from him, as if in fear almost. It was an effort to reach out and link arms with him, and somehow Gopal was immensely relieved to feel a solid human arm. The other Gopal seemed equally relieved. Whatever calamity had menaced them was turned aside and passed away into the night.

"It is very late," said Gopal. "I must run home now, but to-morrow in the afternoon I will come and whistle for thee, thus."

He whistled shrilly, with two fingers in his mouth.

"It is clever, is it not?" he said, with a laugh. "I will teach thee the trick of it. Also I will bring some kites and a winder of glassy cotton."

"Farewell till to-morrow afternoon," said the other Gopal, and they parted, each turning away towards his own home.

From the marquee in the big field the actors could still be heard, but the field itself was deserted, and only the litter remained to tell of the early evening, with its shouting hawkers, its blazing lights, and its lively crowd. Gopal passed on through the fruit garden and into the house.

"Come, Gopal," called Beni softly from a doorway. "Here is a gift to us from the actors."

He offered a banana leaf bearing sweets made of curds and pistachio nuts, all decorated with silver leaf. Gopal took one.

"I have enjoyed the theatre," he said, "but I am very weary. I should not wish to stay all night."

"Thou art a boy, Gopal. I am a man, so I must go back to see the end of the show, otherwise how shall I tell of it to-morrow. Yet I would gladly go to sleep for I too am weary."

Beni went out again, while Gopal turned thankfully towards his bed. He fell asleep at once. The sweet, which he had put down and forgotten, lay neglected for a time, until an ant wander-

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ing about its business found it. The ant sent a message through the air, and in a little time some hundreds of its fellows joined it. Soon there was a steady procession of ants crawling to the sweet, and another crawling back to a crack in the wall. By morning the sweet had vanished, borne away in a thousand tiny particles. To the ants this was as great a festival as the touring theatre had been to Gopal and his friends.

The next day the theatre remained the one topic of conversation among the children. Gopal, coming out early, found Bundle surrounded by broken earthenware pots and old tin cans, on which he beat valiantly; while his young brother kept up an incoherent chant, the words of which were quite unintelligible, but which Gopal at once recognised as an imitation of the actor-herald.

"Gopal talks to nobody," sang Chenu, in the midst of his jargon, pointing with his finger. "He talks to nobody—talks to nobody—talks to nobody, for I saw him."

Gopal smiled at his cousins and went on. He was used to their nonsense, which seemed to give them great pleasure. They would come to him sometimes with long tales about a completely imaginary friend of theirs named Jadu. They would give accounts of visits to his house, of the beautiful clothes he wore, of his amazing wealth, of the food he gave them to eat. He realized that they were not telling lies, and that they believed entirely in their own stories. He looked backward for a moment.

"I talk to everyone," he said. "I am not like little boys who talk only to Jadu, whom no-one has ever seen."

"We are like Gopal. Gopal is like us," sang Chenu, and as Gopal passed out by the gate he saw the two brothers hugging each other and laughing.

On his way to the house of Dasu, whom he was going to visit, not having seen him lately, he thought about his cousin's childish song. Chenu had meant that he, Gopal, talked to Nobody, who was a kind of person, as in the story Dasu had once told of the giant who cried that No-one had put out his eye. Gopal saw that Nobody could, in a way, exist; he would be someone rather like

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Jadu. One would never quite see him face to face. He might walk beside one, or one would see him for a moment standing on a street corner, full as always of bravado and boast, but, in the main, a good-hearted creature. If there were a company of boys walking along a lonely road, he would be there, lagging behind picking up something, or leaping about in front, usually laughing to himself, as if engaged in a colossal plot that could harm no-one—or, to be exact, a plot which could harm neither Anyone nor No-one, for doubtless he would not wish to hurt himself. The more Gopal pondered about this strange creature, the more interested he became. Although No-one could not be described precisely, some of his habits were known; for example, he would not live in an ordinary house. He might live in a shed at the far end of a garden, and even there he would never be found at home. He might live in a palace, and he would always be disappearing along a distant corridor. Where trees came down to a river's brink, surely he would be lurking, glimpsed sometimes skipping among the tree trunks.

Gopal told Dasu these thoughts as they walked, a little later, in a park.

"I know of him, too," said Dasu. "There is another occasion on which he is seen. When men are lost in the jungle or on the mountains, and are on the last verge of exhaustion and despair, sometimes he appears beside them. When he comes, the unfortunate men are guided back to safety. But those who remember enough to tell this tale, remember also that at the time of his appearance they were doubtful whether he meant them well or ill. His coming gave hope, but brought also doubt—would he perhaps trick them—lead them over an abyss for some unimaginable jest."

"It is strange," said Gopal. "Even at this moment he may be walking at our side. Let us hope he is well intentioned. But, O Dasu, with all our talk of No-one I am forgetting to tell thee of the theatre. It was magnificent. There was a herald, and a king and such music as I have never heard——"

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He went on to recount the jokes of the herald and the man in the dirty shirt. Suddenly he paused, and asked a seemingly irrelevant question.

"How is the health of thy cousin, Ganesh?"

"He is well. Surely he is a philosopher, to be so tranquil and content, and with such a tragic history. I think, Gopal, that no life is so free from vain desires as that of a scholar who loves learning for its own sake, without thought of reputation or riches."

"He is a strange man and lives in a strange house."

"A strange house, maybe," said Dasu, "but by 'strange' thou meanest only quiet, with trees growing wild, and a white wall over a deserted lane. Ganesh is a good man."



Chapter Fourteen

A SHRILL whistle broke the silence of the afternoon; it reverberated along the narrow lane, then the silence was enhanced. Everywhere, at this time of the day, movement slowed down—became more leisured; but under the white wall, and in the tangled foliage beyond there seemed not even a vestige of life.

Gopal put his fingers in his mouth and whistled again. A few moments later the other Gopal appeared at the top of the wall.

"I thought, O Prince, that thou hadst forgotten," said Gopal. "Catch hold of these kites and this winder of cotton, while I climb."

Again Gopal saw that expression of uneasiness he had noticed before. Why was this? At last the solution came to him. The other Gopal was afraid of his touch, or of touching anything handled by him. Once an action of touch was accomplished he was quite happy, but he seemed to dread the moment itself. Gopal could faintly understand that fear now. It was as if, in the moment, they might both be translated to another world, and the whole of life be changed for ever. Yet this threat had been

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overcome the night before, when he had taken his friend's arm.

"Make haste," he insisted. "Hold them while I climb."

The other took the kites and winder. Again he seemed relieved when nothing untoward happened.

Gopal, at his last attempt, had caught the knack of climbing the wall, and this time he managed it without difficulty.

"It is not so easy to climb as it seems," he said, dusting his hands as he sat astride the top. "From inside there is plenty of foothold, but from outside—try thyself some time."

Together the two boys walked through the tangle of branches and into the garden beyond.

"I was with Dasu this morning," said Gopal, "the friend of thy father."

"Thou hast not spoken of meeting me? Thou hast remembered thy promise?"

"I have not spoken. Did I not swear to tell no-one? We spoke of strange things. We spoke of a kind of man, if he is a man in truth, whom one rarely sees. He is of this nature——"

Gopal narrated his talk with Dasu, and concluded:

"We wondered who, or of what kind, he is."

"Why, everyone knows that," the other Gopal laughed merrily. "Of course, it is—it is——" He paused for a long time, and the smile went from his face—"Alas! Gopal, I cannot, I know not how to explain."

"Try, O Prince, to tell me. Is he harmful to men?"

"No! He—they—he is not harmful. I will tell thee one thing more, but I need another promise first. Swear always to remain my friend, unless I ever do thee harm in any way. Swear not to forsake me utterly."

"I swear it."

"Then will I tell thee this, that he of whom thou speakest is, in some ways, like myself. I share his nature in a certain part."

"Surely, I know it," Gopal laughed. "At any moment I expect thee to vanish, taking with thee my kites. Come, Prince, let us

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waste no more time. I must show thee this art of flying kites. Give them to me."

He made ready one of the paper kites, attached it to the cotton and handed it to his friend, who took it this time without hesitation.

"Go a little way off," he said, "and hold it by the side points between the tips of thy fingers. Now! Cast it into the air."

He drew in the cotton and released it, as the kite rose into the air.

"Alas, O Prince," he said, "it is no longer the season for kites, or we might have had a fine contest with other kite-flyers. I fear this is but dull entertainment for thee."

"No, Gopal, nothing is dull in thy company. Hast thou not already shown me a theatre and now this delightful flying of kites? May I try, I myself?"

"Take the winder. It is easy to work. The difficult art is in trying to cut down other kites."

The boys, absorbed in their play were unaware that they were watched from the house. Within a doorway, opening off the verandah, sat Ganesh, Dasu's crippled cousin. On first seeing the boys together, his face bore an expression of amazement, but, when they have played for some time, handing the winder of cotton to one another, laughing and talking with animation, a grave happiness enfolded him. He smiled on them, raising his hand in a gesture of benediction, then, turning his head, called softly. A woman, young and beautiful, came to him. She knelt lovingly beside him, and together they watched, while, heedless of their presence, the boys had eyes only for the diamond of orange-coloured tissue that rode the gentle breeze.

In the days that followed, the friendship of Gopal and Prince grew. Often Gopal would escape from his many companions, and go off to the house with the white wall. The very secrecy of the friendship gave it an added zest, though sometimes Prince irritated Gopal by his refusal to venture beyond the wall.

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"But why, O Prince, can we never go out together?" he asked, on one of these occasions. "There are many things I would show thee. To-day I wished to go to old Li-pen, the seller of gold and silver fish. I know that thou art not willing to visit my father's house, but what harm can there be in going to a stranger? He will know nothing of thee."

"He would know less than that," said the other, laughing for once in connexion with a subject on which he was usually serious. "Thou shalt see, Gopal. Now that we are true friends, it were well for thee to know more of me. I will come to Li-pen with thee, but let me come as if I were alone, and not in thy company."

And so they set off, in silence. Gopal greeted two or three neighbours on the way, but none of them showed any curiosity about his friend. When they came to Li-pen's stall, the old Chinese was happy to see Gopal.

"Here is a pleasant sight for my old eyes," he said. "Why hast thou not come to see me these many months? Do not come only to buy my golden fish. Come often to see what I have, and to converse in friendship. Since thy last visit the wicked boys mock me no more, surely I am thy friend."

"Surely, and I will come at other times. Yet to-day I again come to buy. Is there anything rare?"

"Nothing that is quite new, but this goldfish, though of the usual kind, has a tail larger than most."

He pointed out to Gopal a fish as small as a boy's finger-tip, which carried a train of silken drapery four or five times as large as itself. Prince craned over the bowl at Gopal's side, but the old man took no notice of him at all, almost, Gopal thought, as if he were not there.

"Is not the little princess beautiful in her gown of silk?" said Li-pen. "To thee I will charge two annas only."

"Beautiful, indeed: I will have that one," said Gopal, reaching to his waistband for money.

While they talked, Prince had walked round behind them. Li-pen suddenly turned his head and looked full in his face.

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"It is odd," he said, turning again to Gopal. "I thought that someone was behind me, but we are alone."

In some confusion Gopal paid for the goldfish, which Li-pen gave him in a little earthen bowl of water, took his leave, and went.

"He could not see thee," he said, when he and Prince were alone. "He could not see thee at all."

"That is it, Gopal. Nor can any of the others. Only thou canst see me."

"Art thou a phantom?"

"No, not if thou meanest some evil spirit. I am a boy like thyself, but there is one small difference. Were it not for a misfortune which befell many years ago I would be just as thou art. Trust me, Gopal, and stay my friend."

"We are friends already. That is certain. Now let us look at my goldfish. Is it not a treasure? I have many fish, and all rare ones. Why shouldst thou not come to examine my collection? If I only can see thee, we can go anywhere."

"Anywhere," answered the other Gopal. "Before to-day I was afraid of thy fear, expecting thee to fly from me when my secret was discovered. Now let us go together."

From that time their friendship was firmly founded, and gradually Gopal forgot the utter strangeness of its circumstances. He became accustomed to taking no notice of his friend in the presence of others and derived pleasure from seeing him make signs that whatever was happening at the time could be talked over later, when they were alone.

They continued thus for some months, up to the time when Gopal went away for a few weeks on a visit to relatives. When he returned, Dasu came to call on him.

"Greetings, Gopal," he said, "I trust thy visit was a happy one."

"It was very good. I made many friends and I learnt to drive a bullock-cart. I have much news for thee."

When, at length, Gopal had told of his adventures in the country, he asked news of what had happened in his absence.

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"Nothing remarkable has occurred," said Dasu. "Though for me there is something rather sad. Dost thou recall my cousin Ganesh, whom we once visited——?"

"Of course, who could forget him?"

"He is gravely sick and will die at any moment."

Gopal expressed his grief courteously, but his mind was away from Dasu. What would happen to Prince? As soon as Dasu had taken his leave, Gopal ran all the way to the house with the white wall. Among the tangle of trees he found his friend awaiting him, as if he had known of his coming.

"Thou hast come in time," said Prince, "but only in time. O, my friend, now we must say farewell. My father and mother wait. We are departing."

Unable to speak for grief, Gopal embraced his friend and namesake. Then Prince turned and walked swiftly away. Gopal held out his hand after him. He followed him to the neglected garden beyond the trees, but already the other was half-way to where, on the remote side, stood a man and a woman. The man was Ganesh, and the woman was she whom Gopal had called beautiful on the day of his first visit to the house in Dasu's company. When Prince joined them, all three turned and looked towards Gopal for the last time. He felt an infinity of happy wishes borne towards him.

Now they were going. As he gazed, their distance from him grew vast, and into that distance they dwindled away. From a great way off he saw the other Gopal's final gesture of farewell. Then he was quite alone in the deserted garden. Yet he was not wholly sad, it was as if, like gold-dust floating down through the silent air, their benison was all around him.

When Gopal and Dasu next met they spoke of the death of Ganesh.

"His life was sad indeed," said Dasu. "I did not tell thee all the story. It happened some years ago. He had married in his home village a woman of great beauty. Then, to take up in this city a

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post for which his learning fitted him, he bought the house with the white wall. First he came alone to prepare all, and to have the gardens set out. When he went to bring his wife to her new house, there was a railway accident. His young wife and her baby boy were killed, and he himself crippled for life. From that time he lived alone, save for one old servant. It was some ten or eleven years ago that this happened. Had his child lived, he would now be a boy of about thy age, Gopal. He would have been a handsome lad, I think, with a father of such presence and so beautiful a mother."

"Indeed, he is handsome," said Gopal, "and good."



Chapter Fifteen

THE train, chanting its monotonous song, fled along the iron rails and away from Calcutta.

Among the passengers on the train were Gopal, Dasu, and Beni. They were going to stay with an uncle of Dasu's who lived in a village some two hundred miles from Calcutta. Beni, who had been sent to look after Gopal, was so happy that, now and then, he even overcame the awe in which he held Dasu and addressed him directly.

"What a pleasure it is for Gopal to be twelve years old on one day and over so great a distance," he said. "I do not know on what day I myself was twelve years old, but I know well that it was all in one place. This is the longest journey I have made in my life."

"That is a diverting thought," said Dasu. "To spread an anniversary over a distance of miles is more significant than to spend an ordinary day in travelling. It was well said."

Gopal saw from Beni's look that Dasu's commendation had pleased him greatly.

"We travel so swiftly that whatever happens outside seems as still as a painted picture," said Gopal. "See those men digging. Now they are gone. It was as if each man stood fixed for ever in

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one position. Whatever my father says about science, there is no doubt that going a journey by railway is very enjoyable. At each station there is a new crowd, new scenes, and sellers of food and drink."

"That is true," answered Dasu, "but it is the novelty that charms. Suppose one were compelled to travel by train every day. Would not that become irksome? It would be time stolen from one's life, for, mounting this mechanical carriage, we give up so many hours of living. To us even the men in the field are rare and strange people now, because they are really alive. Were we out there watching them they would not seem so vivid. Out there we too would be alive. We gain in the time we save in getting to our destination, but we have lost for ever out of our lives the journey from Calcutta to my uncle's home."

"Then let us enjoy the novelty," said Gopal. "When do we come to this village, O Dasu? Soon, I hope."

"We reach the station in the afternoon, but we have a journey of three hours by bullock-cart after that."

The station, when they arrived, proved to be smaller than any they had yet passed. Outside was a large clearing around which stood huts, a few being dwelling-places, but the majority, for this was the trading centre of a large area, shops. Beyond the clearing were trees on all sides. Gopal and Beni waited by the luggage, while Dasu went to arrange their transport. Soon they saw him seated on a bullock-cart which came creaking slowly across the clearing. Helped by the driver of the cart, they loaded on the luggage. They climbed aboard, and the cart rumbled off along a narrow road with trees on either side.

"Now we shall be passing through the real jungle," said Dasu. "There is nothing here to remind one of the city. It is difficult to imagine that such a place as Calcutta exists."

"It is so quiet," said Gopal. "The cart creaks, but beyond all is still."

"One has that impression, but, wert thou walking this way, especially at night, the trees would be full of sounds."

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"Full of sounds," echoed the driver of the cart.

It seemed to Gopal that they had been jolting along in the bullock cart for hours, when he heard a noise of tapping. At once there sprang into his mind a tale he had heard long ago about a kind of man seen sometimes at nightfall in remote villages, a man whose face is hidden in a shawl, who strides on, looking neither to right nor left, who speaks to no one, who carries a great staff that can be heard in the distance tapping the ground after he has passed. At his appearance women call their children to them, for it is said he steals away those who are unguarded. He leaves behind him a stir of fear.

The tapping became louder and more insistent. Suddenly there was a harsh grinding noise. The cart stopped.

"That is the third time it has happened," said the driver indignantly. "Twice has the miserable wheelwright charged me for repairing that wheel, and now it is broken again. I must try to repair it."

The boys dismounted from the cart and the driver set to work on the wheel with a crowbar and a lump of rock, which he found nearby. While he was at work a man appeared along the road they had traversed. Walking at a brisk pace, he came up to the driver and spoke in low tones. Gopal approached, but could not hear what was said. This and the villainous aspect of the stranger increased his apprehensiveness, already awakened by the loneliness of the situation, the menace of the jungle, and the approach of night. Surely, thought Gopal, as the man strode off, he is going to collect his brother dacoits that they may lie in wait for us further along the road.

The greenness of the trees had merged into the night, and the driver had lighted a lantern, before the wheel was at last mended. As Dasu had said the jungle was now full of sounds. Jackals were howling near and far, and among the trees life had begun to move. Occasionally the light from the lantern was concentrated and cast back by eyes of fire-green, which vanished, leaving an uneasy doubt as to what formidable creatures were abroad. Again the

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party took their places in the cart, silent, for they were very weary. The moon had not yet risen when they started on their way; only the glimmer from the lantern lit their path; all around was darkness.

They had been jogging on for what seemed to Gopal an interminable length of time, when they heard men's voices approaching. Lights flickered among the trees, giving the impression of a large band of men.

"O Dasu," said Gopal, "it is a gang of dacoits. What shall we do?"

"Why should these men be dacoits? They may be only wayfarers."

"Who would travel at night for choice; they must be men of evil intent. We are benighted in a wild place full of dangers."

Turning, Gopal saw the driver smiling in what seemed to be a sinister manner.

One of the approaching men hailed them, and the cart creaked to a standstill.

"Welcome, cousin Dasu," said a voice. "We were grieved to hear of your mishap, and came out to meet you."

"Here are thy dacoits, Gopal," said Dasu, laughing, "my cousin, Sudhir, and two friends; but over there, hiding in the shadows, is the wicked chief of the dacoits, brought here at our special invitation. Come forth, O cruel bandit."

With a great shout there leapt towards them a new figure.

Gopal was startled—then:

"O Kalyan, beloved Kalyan," he said, "here is joy. See Beni, it is Kalyan himself."

"Not Kalyan, I assure thee," said the hunchback, "but the blood-smeared dacoit chief, come straight from his lair, which is stored with gold and jewels and—white bones. Bones of boys captured while riding in bullock-carts. Bones which he chews, thus."

He began to chew contentedly at a length of sugar cane, beaming at the boys from his bright eyes.

The house of Dasu's uncle was only a short way off, and the

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party soon arrived to find the whole household waiting to welcome them. Strangers were rare in this inaccessible place, and the boys' arrival was an event in the village. The fatigues of the journey were quite forgotten as they ate the little feast prepared for them.

Gopal saw among the servants the villainous stranger who had spoken to the driver of the cart.

"Thou hast given great pleasure to that one, Gopal," said cousin Kalyan, "in mistaking him for a dacoit. It is his simple delight to cause fear in new-comers by his daunting expression, but never yet has he succeeded so well as with thee. Already the other servants call him 'Dacoit', and I do not doubt that he hopes the name will stick."

"I thought that it was a plot when the cart broke down, and truly he has a villainous face."

"Yet he is the most mild of men. Thou wilt learn in time that men's faces have little relation to their characters. The most successful cheats are those whom all trust on sight."

"Just as all men trust thee?"

"Did I not tell thee, I am the Dacoit of the Jungle? However, I must not keep thee in talk. The others are about to go to bed. In the morning we will tell many tales."

The events of the day, recollected, kept Gopal awake for some time, and, when the moon rose, he went to the door and looked out. In the garden, under the silver and jet of the trees, he saw a wolf. It stood quite still for a long moment, then it loped off silently.

"If the dacoit was only foolish imagination, at least I have seen a real wolf," said Gopal. He went back to bed and slept soundly all the night.

The crowing of cocks and the shrill song of birds awakened him early. He went out into the freshness of the morning, but Kalyan was before him.

"Was it not a surprise to see me last night, Gopal?" he said, "I came through the kindness of Dasu. He asked me to share thy

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holiday here, and I arrived two days ago. Already I know most of the villagers, and it is a district full of diversions. Come with me; we will take a short walk before the others awaken."

As they sauntered off through the gardens and along a wide road with open spaces of grass on one side and cultivated fields on the other, Gopal looked back at the house of Dasu's uncle.

"It is surprising to find so great a house in such a remote place," he said. "How could they bring here the materials from the distant station?"

"Thine is a common mistake," said Kalyan, smiling. "Why must the materials for building anything beautiful or useful come from some great city? To the best of my knowledge that house is built from local products; some few devices may have come from the city, and they would be brought by cart and by the road along which thou thyself didst travel yesterday."

"It is a fine house. Surely there can be no house to equal it for many miles."

"There is one other large house, and it is there that we are now going, or at least to the garden. I am troubled over a kitten that is there."

They turned off the main road, and after a short walk came to a large wooden gate. Within the gate was a drive leading to a wide-spreading house. Kalyan led the way along the drive and into a grove of trees in the centre of which was a kind of kennel. He whistled. A face peered at them suspiciously, then a little hand was held out, and finally the monkey, for such it was, emerged from its dwelling. It held clasped tightly to its breast a white kitten.

"There is the trouble," said Kalyan. "Three days ago the monkey's little one died. She became distraught with grief and very fierce. They had to chain her by the long chain thou seest attached to her ankle, for she attacked people. Yesterday morning she captured the kitten, which wandered too near, and since then she has been trying to suckle it and treat it as her own young one. She has held it in her arms all the time, and bites at any who try

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to take it from her. We fear the kitten will die. The monkey will allow me to approach provided I do not try to touch the kitten. Yesterday I was able to leave it some milk. I will try again."

Kalyan picked up an earthenware dish that lay by the kennel, went off and returned after a while bringing a pitcher of milk. He poured some milk into the dish and set it down beside the monkey, which, although it watched him closely, made no attempt to hurt him. When he drew back the monkey moved the dish nearer, and held the kitten to it. The kitten lapped eagerly until the monkey suddenly became jealous, upset the dish and tried to force the little creature to suckle at her own breast.

"It is an apt demonstration," said Kalyan. "See, Gopal, how even love misdirected can bring destruction to the object of love. We will return later. There is an old servant of the house who can also approach the monkey. He and I together may be able to take the kitten from her without harm, otherwise it will surely die."

"I pray that thou wilt succeed."

"I believe we shall. We will bring Dasu and Beni with us to meet the master of the house. He is a hunter, and has slain many leopards and tigers. Thou knowest, Gopal, that I have no love for wanton killers, yet, apart from this one side of his character, he is a kindly and amiable man. I have argued with him, but he is not to be moved. Nothing is so good to him as pitting his skill and his life itself against the skill and life of a wild beast. Twice already he has been severely mauled, but he continues in his course of action, which, although I do not approve, in a strange way I respect. The reason, Gopal, is this: he hunts alone and on foot, so that the beast has an almost equal chance with him. He may be killed himself in any of these encounters. Those men, however, who hunt and slay for diversion, risking nothing, and knowing that the beasts have no chance of revenge, they are unworthy of respect."

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"Thou art a lover of justice, cousin Kalyan, justice even for wild animals."

"Justice must be universal, and not for one set of men or one set of creatures. The kitten and the tiger, the elephant and the leopard, Moti, the cow, and Kalyan, the hunchback, all are living creatures, and all must have justice."

They walked on in silence for a little. Suddenly Kalyan snatched Gopal's arm fiercely and dragged him back. Being away from the city, Gopal had left off his sandals and walked barefoot. A slender green snake was creeping across the drive at the place where his foot would have fallen.

"That kind is poisonous," was all the hunchback said, as they turned into the roadway.

Near the house they met Beni and Dasu.

"We have been searching for you," said Dasu. "There are so many things I wish to show you."

"It is still early," said Kalyan. "There will be time for all you may want to do. Come, let us get to our morning meal. This walk has made me hungry."

They entered the house, Gopal telling of what he had seen that morning, and of how Kalyan had saved him from the green snake.



Chapter Sixteen

GOPAL and Beni were enchanted by the birds and beasts they saw as they walked with Kalyan and Dasu along the outskirts of the jungle.

"See, Gopal," called Beni. "Here on the wet ground are frogs no bigger than the tip of my smallest finger. I did not know that frogs could be so small."

"Sometimes, in the rainy season, it rains thousands of those little frogs," said Dasu.

"That is true I have seen it," said Kalyan, for Gopal looked incredulous. "I think that these minute creatures are drawn into the air in one place by some disturbance of the atmosphere and then they fall in another place with the rain."

"No-one in the city would believe that."

"No, they would say that the little frogs had come out in thousands to enjoy the heavy rain, and that the simple country folk were deluded by this into thinking that they had fallen from the skies. But I, who have had them dropping on my head and shoulders, would not argue with the people of the city. I am content to know the truth of the matter."

"Your honour has much wisdom concerning animals," said Beni.

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"Here is grandeur for me," said Kalyan, smilingly putting his arm round Beni's shoulders. "Brother, in my own place I am Kalyan to all, children and grown men. When I travel abroad my stature does not increase. I am still Kalyan to thee and to all my friends. As for animals, I have some little knowledge, for it gives me great pleasure to study their ways. Let us tell tales about animals."

"Tell us, Kalyan, of monkeys," said Gopal. "What is the strangest tale about monkeys?"

"There are many tales, but in my judgment the best thing I have encountered is not a tale but a fact. At a certain place of pilgrimage the pilgrims leave their clothes at the side of the river while they bathe. Then the monkeys come down and steal the clothes, carrying them swiftly up the trees out of reach. The pilgrims come from the water and find their clothes gone. They search in vain, asking all whom they meet whether they have seen the missing property. Soon they find one who knows the habits of the monkeys, and he tells what must be done. Offerings of fruit are left at those places where the clothes were formerly laid. The pilgrims retire some way off to watch, and behold! the monkeys come down, leave the clothes in their proper places, take the fruit, and make off rejoicing. Although many have heard of this trick the monkeys are cunning and every day they find fresh victims. These men are usually as ready to laugh at the trick as the bystanders, once they have paid the ransom and recovered their property."

"And yet there are people who deny to beasts any power of reasoning," said Dasu. "It would be a just retribution if some of these were among those bereft of their clothes."

The trees of the jungle gave place to low bushes as they walked on, and presently they came out on a vast open space of marsh land, over which wheeled flocks of wild birds.

"This is a solitary place," said Gopal. "It seems as if no man had ever yet passed this way."

They stood contemplating the scene. However far the eye

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strained to see, it was the same—the still surface of the shining waters, dotted here and there with islets of vegetation.

The loud report of a gun burst against the soft mewing of the birds. Kalyan looked around in wonderment.

"There is only one person in these parts who has a gun," he said, "but surely there is nothing here for him to shoot. The sound seemed to come from over yonder; let us walk that way and see what caused it."

The party moved back among the bushes and then in the direction indicated by Kalyan. Soon they heard voices, and a few moments later came on two men striding towards them. One was tall and powerful, with a penetrating gaze. He bore a gun. Behind him walked his servant, carrying several dead birds, mostly teal.

"Greetings, Kalyan," said the tall man. "I fear that I do not meet thee in auspicious circumstances, knowing thy dislike of my sport. Alas! It is not very diverting here. There is nothing to kill but wild duck."

"Greetings, O hunter. I commiserate with thee. It is a fall from tigers and leopards to harmless birds."

"Thou art in the right. I must set out on my travels again. Meanwhile I dare not lose my skill, so the birds must suffer; they are better than naught. Let us not quarrel about our opposed views on killing. Come to me this afternoon and we will talk as friends of other things, bring with thee these young men."

"I shall be happy to come."

"I shall await you."

He went on through the bushes, followed by his servant.

Kalyan and his friends lingered for a while by the marsh, talking.

"Dost thou remember, Kalyan, when I was unhappy to see the snake killed by the mongoose?" asked Dasu.

"I remember. I said that it was in the nature of the mongoose to kill the snake. Yet that is no argument against me. It is not in the nature of men to kill birds. Neither thou nor I nor Beni

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nor Gopal has killed a bird ever. That hunter began to kill for the delight in his own skill and for the joy of risking his life against wild beasts; it is indeed a kind of gambler's joy to him. Now, however, if there are no tigers or leopards to be had, he will kill any harmless creature lest he lose his art in killing. The time will come when he will be unable to see either bird or beast without devising some way of taking its life and at the same time proving his superior skill."

"For him destruction takes the place of creation?"

"Thou hast said it neatly, O Dasu. All men must create, some by tilling the land and making it fruitful, some by craftsmanship, some by works of art, and some by writing books, composing poems and music, or raising mighty edifices. This, Gopal, is one of thy father's arguments against machines; that the peasant, who is beguiled from his land and goes to work in a factory, has no outlet for his desire to create. In the end, for those who have a little money, this beneficial urge is perverted towards gambling and drunkenness, which are substitutes for creation. It may take months for a craftsman to make a vase of excellent beauty, but any fool with the thrust of a knife can destroy the craftsman himself. How infinitely greater an effect and from how little skill. Yet some, for whom destruction is creation, still feel the need to use art even in destroying, the need to perfect themselves in their vocation, and, as a man of a certain rare kind can be a genius of creative power, so one of another kind can be a genius of destruction. I do not say that our friend the hunter is one of these. He is merely a man who wastes his mind and energy, which might be directed to some good purpose, in slaying animals for no reason."

Kalyan paused and surveyed the boys. Dasu and Beni were listening with courteous gravity, but Gopal had picked a great red trumpet-shaped flower, and was trying to balance it on his finger.

"Forgive me, my friends," said Kalyan. "I talk overmuch. Unless we hurry we shall be late for the midday meal, and that

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would not be seemly, least of all in the house of Dasu's uncle where we are so hospitably entertained. Come, let us be on our way."

In the early afternoon, while Dasu and Kalyan were playing chess, and Beni was engaged in talk with the villainous looking servant now known to his companions as "Dacoit", Gopal wandering about the house came on a number of books. One of them, in English, was entitled *Coral Island*. He opened it and was soon absorbed in reading the adventures of a party of boys shipwrecked on an island. He had never met anything more delightful. It seemed as if he himself were present on this enchanted place, where everything was fresh and green and full of wonder. When Dasu, having lost his game to Kalyan, came to join him it was with an effort that he brought his mind back from magic regions to everyday life.

"O Dasu," he said, "this is the best book I have ever read. It is about an island in the distant seas and on it are strange marvels. Imagine a tree which grows cloth, another which has bread for its fruit, and another which provides drink."

"I do not need to imagine these things. The tree which provides drink is the coco-nut. There are some in the garden here. Not far off is a tree which produces a fibrous growth similar to fabric. We have no breadfruit trees, but there are many of a kind not so very different."

"Then these things are in truth quite common."

"Quite common, yet no less marvellous than they seemed to thee in reading the book. It was the writer's presentation that brought out the wonder of the trees, which is always there whether they grow in our garden or on the remote side of the world. To most of the boys who read that book thy life would be as strange as what thou hast read is to thee."

"That is amusing. Now I can think of myself as having strange adventures, just as the shipwrecked boys on their island had adventures."

"Kalyan gets much pleasure in that way. Whatever chances he

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regards as something new and strange and full of interest. This makes him an entertaining companion."

"He is the best of companions. See, here he comes."

"I need help," said Kalyan, entering the room. "I need two expert cooks to help me. I am making sweets for the children. Come."

He led them to an outhouse where a number of children were gathered. Their gentle babble of talk rose to a clamour when he appeared.

"Here is Kalyan, the sweet-maker," the children cried.

"Now hearken carefully, all of you," said Kalyan, "that all may know how to make these sweets. Yesterday at this time I prepared a thin paste of flour and water, of the thickness of cream. I covered it and left it all night. Besides this mixture I use only sugar, rosewater, cardamoms, and butter. Dasu, do thou take this pot with sugar and water. Boil and stir it to make a thick syrup. Flavour it with rosewater. Gopal, do similarly, but flavour thy syrup with seeds of cardamom."

Gopal and Dasu set their pots down on a clay oven that Kalyan had improvised in the outhouse. Kalyan himself began to melt clarified butter in a large metal pan. When it was hot he picked up a clay funnel, sealing the spout with his forefinger. He filled the bowl of the funnel with the paste of flour and water, held it over the pan, and took away his finger, letting flow a thin stream into the smoking butter. He moved his hand round quickly as the mixture fell, so that it formed catherine wheel shapes in the pan. As the shapes were fried, he removed them with a scoop and put them to drain on a large banana leaf nearby. When a good number were ready, he dropped half of them into Dasu's syrup and half into Gopal's.

"The sweets are ready," shouted the children. "Let us taste, O Kalyan, let us taste."

"Wait a moment. Have patience," said Kalyan. "Let the syrup soak into the sweets. Our desire grows keener, and the sweets become sweeter, while we wait. Ah! How my mouth waters

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when I think of the crisp sweets rich with perfumed syrups. In the meantime I will tell a tale."

"Tell us a short tale, Kalyan, while we wait," said a little girl, "and a long tale when we are eating the sweets."

"So be it, my child, a short tale first. Many hundreds of years ago there were no sweets, no sweet shops, and no makers of sweets. Nothing at all. Think, my children, how unhappy were the little ones born in those days. No sweets. Alas! I could almost weep to think of their sad lot. Now it chanced one day that a lonely peasant, whose name I do not know, but I think it was Kalyan——"

"His name was Kalyan," shouted the children.

"Yes, let it be Kalyan. This Kalyan, then, was boiling some milk, and by accident a piece of tamarind fell into it. He put the milk aside thinking it spoiled, but later he tasted it before throwing it away. He expected it to be like milk that turns bad in the heat; to his surprise it was sweet and pleasantly acid mixed. He had discovered curds and whey. He made more. He separated the curds from the whey by straining it through a cloth. He mixed the curds with sugar, and made little cakes, garnished with nuts. He made little balls of the curds, fried them in butter, and soaked them in syrup. He tried all manner of mixtures, and found that from milk, butter and sugar he could make many delicious sweets. Then he opened the first sweet shop. You may imagine how its fame spread. The children clustered round his shop all day. He was never lonely now. He was like me. I think the sweets are ready at last, so my tale ends."

Amid cries of joy Kalyan gave out the sweets. These were tasted and pronounced perfect. Blissfully the children ate and besmeared themselves with syrup.

Over at the far side of the garden the bullock slowly creaked its way round the well. With unfailing regularity two red earthen bowls appeared from the cool, damp, ferny depths, and emptied the waters into channels in the thirsting earth. So the garden flourished.

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"In a certain distant land," began Kalyan, "the moon has a different colour every night. One night it is green as a lime, the next flame-red, the next amethyst, then the rose-white of a pearl. Each night has its own moon, and all the people can tell which night of the week it is. Only once was this natural order disturbed, and that was the awful night when there was a yellow moon on a Monday. What a calamity! You can hardly believe it, my children, yet I assure you it was so. And this was how it came about. An inoffensive barber was going his rounds, and as he entered the courtyard of a large house he met——"



Chapter Seventeen

"I AM most happy when we are together like this," said Gopal, as they again set out for the house of the hunter. "Kalyan and Dasu and Beni and Gopal, we are all of different ages, yet we make a harmonious company. Though I am the youngest I do not feel ill at ease as I would with three other grown men."

"It is probably because we are simple people," said Dasu. "Kalyan and Beni and I do not hide our pleasure in events that many would consider trivial."

"Why should we?" said Kalyan. "Pretentiousness and pretence are the most wearying things in the world. I think that if I were a very wicked man I would not give myself the trouble, as so many do, of pretending to be good."

"But, wert thou wicked, it would be necessary," said Dasu. "No evil man can prosper greatly without the respect of his fellows."

"Can the wicked prosper and enjoy respect?" asked Gopal.

"They not only can, but do. On every side the rich scoundrel oppresses his poor neighbour. Let him but be sanctimonious in

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his behaviour and he will be held in esteem by all who have not suffered at his hands."

"But, Kalyan, where is Justice, if the wicked prosper and true men are oppressed?"

"It is not for me to understand how providence works, yet I am sure that in the end the wicked are punished and the good rewarded. I will tell a tale which has some bearing on this:

THE STORY OF GULJAN, THE BEGGAR

as told by KALYAN

Early one morning a certain beggar, by name Guljan, cleared his throat lustily and tried his voice. "Two grains of rice, for the love of charity, two grains of rice. Acquire merit at a low cost, all you good people." The cry was uttered only to reassure himself that he could still infuse into his plea the proper tone of misery that moves the hearts of the charitably disposed, for it was very early, and no-one seemed to be stirring. He gazed across the empty courtyard of the silent house. Suddenly a shutter opened noisily and a group of men crossed the courtyard towards the water-tank. Guljan withdrew to the roadway and settled down to watch them at their morning bath.

Apart from his profession, Guljan's life was spent in a search for entertainment. In this he was like your friend and cousin, Kalyan. He would fight his way to the front of any crowd round a roadside conjurer or promoter of contests between a snake and a mongoose. Even the play of the three monkey actors won his approval, though every gesture was familiar; nor did he ever fail to applaud when the wealthy but aged monkey suitor was rejected in favour of the young and poor one. The present spectacle could hardly be compared in richness to any of these, nevertheless it was momentarily diverting to one who bathed but rarely.

The bathers, however, strolled up and down gossiping, arguing, brushing their teeth, and generally wasting time to such a degree that even Guljan became impatient. When at last they had finished bathing, and, one by one, had returned into the house, he snapped his fingers in relief. Silently he crept over to the water-tank. He did not hope to find anything but, being a man who lived by

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picking up what others had discarded, he missed no chances. This time he was lucky beyond all expectation. Pools of water glistened silver on the stone dais round the tank, and in one pool his keen eye observed a brighter gleam. It was a rupee piece. Filled with joy, he folded the coin several times into his waistband, and hurried from the courtyard. He thought it wiser not to linger at that house to beg.

When he had removed himself a sufficient way off, he slowed his gait and began to contemplate his good fortune. Never had he possessed so much money. Gifts of food could be had; gifts of money were scarce; occasionally the very charitable would give a pice, but that was the utmost. Now he owned sixty-four pice, but his wealth brought worry with it. He would have trouble in keeping his treasure from Bulbul, the leader of the band of beggars. As you know, these nomadic tribes of beggars have the custom of choosing beautiful names; the last leader had been called "Garden embellished with perfumed fountains". This one, although named after a charming bird, was a most suspicious man. Being wanderers who begged their way right across the country and back, the band had been forced to become a sharing community simply in order to survive. All the proceeds of their work went to the common fund, which was divided equally among them by the leader. Though they were rogues and petty thieves, nearly all of them were honest in giving up the fruits of their begging. Guljan was not of these. To the band he seemed one of the most foolish of their number. In truth he was the best beggar of them all, but, as most of what he obtained was diverted to his personal use, his contribution to the fund was small.

Perhaps, this Guljan thought, he could now become an independent beggar, perhaps a tradesman, a pedlar of toy musical instruments or daggers. In the meantime it was necessary to resume his morning's work. With assumed dejection and humility he approached a house. In answer to his cry, a fat woman came to the doorway. She did not draw her sari across her face, and she even took the begging-bowl from his hand, instead of ordering him to put it on the floor and retreat to a suitable distance. Evidently she was a prosperous woman, but not of a high caste, and the more likely to be generous.

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"Two grains of rice to fill my starving belly," Guljan cried. He expected no more than some cold boiled rice. This must have been a well-omened morning, for when the woman gave back the bowl it was crammed with rice, on top of which lay a good handful of aubergine curry and a piece of tamarind conserve.

"The queen of Iran is less beautiful than the great toe of this lovely rose, who has heaped riches on the miserable Guljan," he said, and for once he spoke with some true feeling of gratitude. He made off, seeking a place to sit and eat. There were many people abroad by this time, and it was difficult to find a secluded spot. Not that he troubled himself about a crowd, but there was a chance of being seen by one of the other beggars. At last he came to the open ground beside the bazaar, and sat facing a wall. Passers-by would assume that this was some poor but courteous person turning his back on the world to avoid the breach of decorum involved in eating while others watched.

His mouth watering, Guljan scooped off the top part of the rice with the curry and conserve. With the addition of a cake of hand-bread, previously secreted in his bag, he made a most enjoyable meal. The tamarind gave a touch of luxury, and to complete his happiness a bazaar boy gave him a partly smoked *biri*. As he inhaled its smoke his feelings were much as those of a rich merchant after a banquet, meditating his enterprises over a perfumed hookah.

The beggars were making their way back to their camp from all directions. Among the last came Guljan, walking slowly with a consequential gait. It was this that proved his undoing, as it amused a group of bad boys to see a beggar walk so proudly. A clod of earth struck his back. He turned and saw the boys picking up missiles to throw at him. Shouting a malediction, he began to run. He ran so fast that he had to hoist up his waist-band several times.

As he arrived panting among his companions, Bulbul was finishing the collection of the morning's profits. In a great bowl was the cooked rice, in a smaller one the uncooked rice, and in the smallest of all a mixture of various curries. On a cloth on the ground lay two or three pice, some cowrie shells, and an assortment of trifles.

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"What is this, brother?" said Bulbul, taking Guljan's bowl. "Plain rice again! Hast thou no arts of flattery or simulated woe to beg a little curry?" While he talked, his fierce eyes wandered over Guljan's person, and fixed themselves on a point in his middle. There, like a moon rising from a grey sea into a brown sky, the outline of the rupee stood out from the edge of his waist-band, which had been displaced by his running. Without any word, Bulbul turned away to empty Guljan's rice into the great bowl; but he not only took from the begging-bowl, he also put something in it, so swiftly as to pass unnoticed. It was a speck of curry. Turning on Guljan in a fury, he held out the bowl.

"O vile son of a pig, never canst thou bring curry. Here is the reason. Where was thy cunning, to eat what was withheld from thy brothers, and yet to leave a trace of thy theft." His eyes were still fixed on the coin at Guljan's waist.

The enraged beggars crowded round Guljan, cursing him loudly. In his discomposed state he believed that he must have been so careless as to leave some of the curry on the bowl. At last Bulbul's compelling glare reminded him of the rupee. Perhaps he might even now justify himself.

Like most men of imagination, Guljan had his waking dreams. One of these, which often came back to him, was of meeting some rich and generous man who gave him a bag of gold. Another favourite dream was of himself being someone of importance and consideration. Now these two ideas, so often pondered, came to his aid. His ready mind, working more quickly in his danger, wove the story for his defence. The silver rupee fitted neatly into its place in the story, and by its presence gave proof of what might otherwise have sounded a far-fetched lie. Smiling, Guljan stepped forward.

"O most excellent Bulbul, hear your servant's story before you misjudge him so harshly. It is true that a charitable woman gave me some curry, but that was merely a small piece of good fortune compared with what followed. As I was returning with my bowl, a certain man passing saw the curry, and he, though well clothed and a person of importance, asked me to give it to him.

"Do you beg of a wretched beggar?" I asked him.

"No! I ask a gift of my brother," he answered, and such was

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his presence and so great his condescension that I gave it to him.

"In our profession we often tell people that charity brings good fortune. I, a beggar, had given in charity, and soon I received proof that this saying is true.

" 'Where I receive, there I give,' said this great one, and when he had eaten the curry. He gave me this—a silver rupee, which I gladly render to our common fund."

His companions, who a little earlier had been cursing him, applauded joyously. Bulbul proclaimed him a prince among beggars. Guljan had gained greatly in popularity. He was almost consoled for the loss of his rupee. Even when he noticed that the speck of curry on the bowl in his hand was different in colour and odour from the curry that he had eaten, he only admired Bulbul's cunning.

Later, Bulbul took him aside.

"O Guljan, thou king of liars, that was a good story. Where thou didst get the rupee I care not. I see in thee a ready wit and a cunning almost equal to my own. Our band is large, and I need a second-in-command to see that a strong rule is kept. I name thee for this post. There will be certain perquisites, naturally. See that in future thy skill is directed in my favour and not against me."

From that day the band grew gradually more prosperous. Guljan's schemes for peddling toys and small tools were approved by Bulbul. Begging became secondary in their activities until, in a few years, what had been a band of beggars became a caravan of traders.

Always Guljan remembered the character he had created in the story that changed his fortune. The story seemed to become more real as time passed, and in the end he forgot that the generous man had come from his own mind. Sometimes he sought to find him again.

"So Guljan prospered, although he had cheated his brother beggars?" said Gopal.

"That is how it seems on the surface," said Kalyan, "but consider; the result of his promotion was that the whole band prospered, and instead of being parasites became traders. It may

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be that he was punished at another time and in another place, though he would not perhaps recognize the punishment as being a requital of his former dishonesty. Perhaps in his prosperity he over-ate and suffered from dyspepsia, or perhaps his honest labours as a trader earned his pardon. It is not for us to judge even in so simple an example as this, how much less can we see the truth when the causes of what appears to be an injustice are far-reaching and subtle beyond the mind of man. A whole nation may suffer in order that, somewhere in the future, that nation shall bring forth great and good men. Surely there is a vast design. In the end surely the just shall prevail and the unjust shall perish."

They came again to the grove of trees where the monkey's kennel stood. Kalyan called out, but there was no answer. He looked into the kennel.

"The monkey is not here," he said, "nor is the kitten. I trust that no harm has befallen them."

They passed on down the narrow drive and came out to an open garden. The scene before them was this:

The monkey sat trembling on a post of wood, which formed part of a fence. A servant held the end of the chain attached to the beast's leg. Some of the other servants of the house stood around watching. There was a mound of earth on the grass by a freshly dug hole. Facing the monkey a short way off stood the hunter, his gun levelled.

With a murmur of dismay Kalyan started forward. At the same moment the hunter fired. The report echoed back from the house. The monkey pressed her little hands to her breast, and looked from side to side as if in bewilderment. Then slowly the fur beneath her hands was darkened with blood. She toppled and fell to the ground. One of the servants picked her up by the tail and swung her over into the hole. Another began to shovel in the earth.

"Stay, friend," said Kalyan to him. "Wait at least until it is certain that she is quite dead."

At a sign from the hunter the servants withdrew.

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"Come, Kalyan," he said, "be not distressed at the death of the monkey. It was necessary. When one of the servants took the kitten from her, she bit him severely. She had become deranged, I fear, and would have been dangerous to all who approached her. I thought it best to end her life. Let us go now and have some refreshment."

They followed their host in silence. Gopal, turning to Kalyan, saw a tear on his cheek. Dasu's face was grave and impassive. Beni looked from one to another as if he guessed that something had happened of greater consequence than was apparent and would know what it might be.

During the remainder of his stay at the house of Dasu's uncle, Gopal had many happy days; but every night, before he slept, there rose up in his mind the image of the monkey with her little hands pressed to her torn breast. He thought that he would never forget.



Chapter Eighteen

GOPAL sat on the stone parapet of the jasmine-covered arch joining the outer and inner buildings of "My father's house". With him were Beni, Chenu and Bundle. The perfume of the flowers sweetened the dusk. In a low voice Gopal went on with the tale he was telling:

"—and then we saw torches shining among the trees. I thought that we were ambushed by dacoits, and in such a place it was quite likely, was it not, Beni?"

"It was a place well suited to dacoits, I should judge."

"Just so, but—hearken, O Chenu, thou canst make garlands of flowers at any time—when the dacoits, as I took them to be, surrounded us, their chief was—whom think you?"

"A giant with golden tusks," hazarded Chenu.

"No, certainly not. He was—Cousin Kalyan."

"Thou art always lucky," said Bundle. "Chenu and I are not allowed to go to jungles and meet Kalyan as a dacoit chief."

"They must be very kind dacoits if cousin Kalyan is their chief," said Chenu. "When I am a man I shall join his dacoits."

"There were no dacoits, it is merely that I imagined there were. They were Dasu's relatives. But was it not a happy surprise to

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meet Kalyan in the middle of this distant jungle, at night, and we so weary."

"I should like to meet him now and I am not weary," said Chenu. "He has better tales than thine, Gopal, and sugar pellets too."

"Heed him not, Gopal," said Bundle, "he is but six years old. Chenu, be silent while Gopal speaks."

Gopal continued his tale and when he came to tell of the journey back to Calcutta Bundle interrupted:

"But what of Kalyan? Did he return to his own home?"

"That is the best of it. He did not. He had to stay behind to attend a wedding ceremony of one of the villagers, and, my little ones, he will be here to-morrow."

"Kalyan is coming. Kalyan is coming. Kalyan is coming," Chenu shouted, thumping Beni's back to keep time.

"Let us welcome him with garlands," said Bundle, "and let us light many lamps."

Chenu and Bundle went off to bed, and Beni on some errand of his own. Gopal, left alone in the serene of the evening, thought of Dasu and Kalyan. "We are all simple men, Kalyan and Beni and I," Dasu had said, and he had believed himself to be telling the truth. He was mistaken. Beni was a simple man by nature, Kalyan had achieved simplicity and a great kindliness, but Dasu, as he had known from the day when they had first met, was a person apart. On their return from his uncle's house, Dasu had given Gopal a birthday present. It was a slenderly fashioned lamp of silver gilt. The present, Gopal thought, was like the giver—the warm gold on the surface represented Dasu's wish to be friendly to all men, to share their human sympathies; but the solid silver within was his true character, precious yet cold, chaste, and aloof. Dasu would never harm any man; he would, indeed, always act benevolently whenever a choice of action was put before him, but he would do so without any positive feeling of kindness. To behave cruelly, harshly, or even discourteously, would mar whatever scrupulous code of elegance ordered his life. It was impossible to imagine Dasu giving way to rage, it was

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equally impossible to imagine him deeply grieved over the death of a friend. He would be touched by a light sorrow, utter the expressions of regret ordained by custom, but remain free. This was the truth. This was why he had no friends except Gopal himself and Kalyan. He drew back from any who offered a gift of their spirit of friendship, knowing that they expected a return in kind. He would have no trammels about his soul. Gopal recognized that a part of his own nature was similar to Dasu's, hence a friendship had been possible between them, for neither friend would make demands on the other. Kalyan's kindness was so all-embracing that it expected no return, his friendship poured out in an endless stream, filling the arid places in others and overflowing back on itself. So he and Dasu were friends.

Once, during their holiday, Gopal had by accident come on Dasu in the jungle. A squirrel sat before him. Dasu bent over the small wild creature, had seemed like the tutelary god of the jungle. Gopal had surprised in his eyes a look of protecting affection that he knew would never be turned on any human being. Already Gopal had learnt to make allowances for the ill tempers, the dishonesties, and the foolish cruelties of others. Dasu would never do this. Just as, with his fastidious cleanliness of person, he withdrew from anything that might soil his spotless clothes, so he kept his mind from the entanglement of human weaknesses and follies. He might love creation, and momentarily concentrate that love on a single creature, but it would not be a human creature.

"Thou art grave in the evening," second uncle's voice broke the silence. "What deep thoughts art thou pondering?"

"I was thinking of Dasu."

"A well-mannered young man, but lacking in force. One cannot have an enjoyable argument with him. He acquiesces without really agreeing."

Second uncle was right. Dasu simply withdrew himself, making an attempt at showing a polite interest, when it was doubtful if in fact he felt any concern at all over matters which were of

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great moment to others. Gopal had come to like second uncle, and even to have a kind of admiration for his enthusiasms. So many people, he had found, went through life doing and saying only whatever was appropriate for men in their position to do and say, that even to have a real enthusiasm for mechanical contrivances made a person original. It was part of a newly-born pride in his family to think of his father and uncles that, if their conventional actions and words were taken away, there would still be much remaining. Gopal could in the present instance understand second uncle's opinion of Dasu, but he realized also that it was only true in part. In some ways Dasu was less than most men, in others he was greater.

"He is kind to me," he said. "I had much happiness during my stay at his uncle's house."

"Of course, and Kalyan was there too. We shall be glad to see him here to-morrow. Kalyan, now, is an entertaining talker. When he was last here he and I talked far into the night and we had not finished our argument even then. His ideas on cultivation are old fashioned. I must try again to convert him. I must think of some persuasive words, for he is an opponent of wit."

Kalyan arrived in the early afternoon on the following day, but he was at first too busy entertaining and being entertained by the children of the house to spare much time for second uncle. Asok and Amal had come, bringing with them Little Prince, their parrot.

"Take him, Kalyan," said Asok, holding out his hand on which the parrot stood looking rather like an old philosopher who felt that he had fallen into doubtful company.

"I fear his wise and all-knowing eye. He seems to say, 'Kalyan, none of thy sins is hidden from me'."

"Not so, cousin; see he feels with his claw for thy arm."

The bird moved its claw tentatively in the air, and with an effort took a grip on Kalyan's outstretched wrist. It sidled quickly up his arm, reached his shoulder, and performed a solemn little

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dance of triumph. A fly passing overhead drew its attention, it craned its head over sideways and watched intently.

"Wicked bird, clip his tail," growled the parrot. All the children laughed delightedly, and Kalyan and Gopal's father, who had just entered, could not forbear smiling at the easily recognized imitation of eldest uncle's voice.

"Do not forget us, the elders, Kalyan," said Gopal's father, when they had ceased laughing. "Thou art always so much in the company of the children that we miss thy conversation and tales."

"Tales are for children, brother, and my talk has too little of learning in it to entertain the wise."

"Then let the wise be banished to the islands of their own dulness; my brothers and I expect thee to-night."

In the evening Gopal met by the gates Dasu, who had been asked to dinner.

"I am a man now," said Gopal. "I am allowed to join you to-night with Kalyan, and my father, and the uncles."

"Thou art a man, and I am old, Gopal, very old."

"Yet not without vanity," said Gopal, pointing to the purple border of his dhoti, which was pleated in front in the manner of the dandies.

"I crave indulgence, O sage," said Dasu, laughingly taking his arm, "but see my wooden sandals; are they not ascetic enough for thee, thou wearer of embroidered Delhi shoes?"

They entered the largest room in the front building, which had been made bright with many lamps.

After dinner the party relaxed and Dasu and Gopal were encouraged to join in the general talk. Kalyan, who had a voice of great beauty, sang a song and recited a poem.

"I have heard that thou art a considerable figure at literary contests," said youngest uncle to Kalyan.

"Once or twice I have won a prize; but do not think that these are great affairs such as you in the city might hold. They are in truth only friendly gatherings of neighbours. We are not men of talent in my village and, even so, I have won, I believe, more by

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my good voice, which is a gift of nature, than by my own merit."

" 'Such as you in the city might hold', thou sayest, but we have no time, it would seem, for such good amusements. It is you of the villages who keep alive the tradition."

"What are these contests?" asked Gopal.

"They consist of impromptu composition," said Kalyan. "We meet together at the house of one or another of our friends. The contestants are paired off, and subjects are decided. In each pair, by the toss of a coin, one is chosen to begin. It is also decided by lot the order in which the pairs shall perform. Then the first member of the first pair, after an interval of thought, steps into the middle of the room and declaims a poem on his set subject. Suppose, for example, that this were old age. He might urge the sadness of a man in his declining years, when his friends are dead or estranged, his children grown up and busy with their own interests, when his trembling hands fail him and his sight falls dim, when finally the mere act of living is burdensome and hardly to be borne. Then his opponent must compose a poem taking up his arguments and refuting them. He will point to the folly and rashness of youth, with its pains over trifles. He will show, giving examples from history, how an old man who has garnered wisdom through a useful life can benevolently rule his household to the advantage of all. He will argue that only a man who has suffered the experiences and accidents of life can be a true philosopher. When he has concluded, opinions are taken of all the others present and one of the two adjudged the winner. Each pair proceeds similarly, until half the contestants are eliminated. The survivors are again paired off, and so on until only one pair remains. You may imagine how the excitement grows as the contest proceeds, how the contestants search their minds for fresh images and resplendent phrases. It is as pleasant a way of passing an evening as I know."

"I am no poet, Kalyan," said second uncle, "but I would argue with thee. Dost thou remember our talk on methods of cultivating the land?"

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"Indeed, I remember. Thou wouldst have us all take down barriers and fences, and then drive some kind of machine back and forth across great tracts of land."

"In a sense that is right. My meaning is that small plots of land, such as thine, cannot be tilled separately if the land is to yield its full fruit. Let many people unite their lands, cultivate them, in large stretches, then share the results. The yield will be two and three times as much as before. Science, the wisdom of the future, has invented chemical fertilizers which produce results hardly to be believed——"

"But, brother," broke in Gopal's father, "I have heard that with these fertilizers the story is similar to that of a man who takes drugs; at first his powers are stimulated and his perceptions heightened, then he falls into lassitude and has to take a larger amount of the drug to regain his former state. The subsequent fall is even greater, and he is forced to take yet more of the drug, continuing thus until in the end the drug kills him."

"Brother, thou art always bringing in some irrelevant matter. What have drugs to do with cultivation?"

"Merely that the same thing happens with chemical fertilizers. At first the land yields more abundantly than ever before. The next year more fertilizer must be used and the yield, though good, is less than the first time. So it goes on; more and more fertilizer is used to produce less and less result. Quite early in this process the yield falls below that obtained by natural means, and, in the end, the land dies. It has become barren and useless."

"There is a certain measure of truth in what thou sayest, but consider, if we risk nothing we shall learn nothing. We are only at the beginning of the wonderful age to come. We shall make mistakes, but we shall learn wisdom by them. I can foresee the time when at evening we shall be able to say, 'In the whole of this great land none goes hungry to bed, there is no sick child or woman or man who is not tended with kindness and skill, there is not one who of his necessity asks and is denied.' "

"It is a good picture, but shall we bring this about simply by

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embracing every new idea and casting away all the wisdom of the ages?"

"Perhaps not, but if on the one side are you who hold fast to the old ways, admitting nothing new, there must be another side urging every new way of thought, then between us we may evolve a middle way preserving whatever of the old wisdom is good, but quick to seize on new and advantageous ways of acting."

"These problems", said Kalyan, "may be for Gopal or Gopal's children, for my part I am too old to welcome change. I love my own plot of ground, I love every tree in it. I love Moti, my cow, who is more an old friend than a mere beast. Let me then live out my days in peace."

"I agree," said Gopal's father, "and now, lest we become too grave, let Kalyan sing to us."

"Come, Kalyan," said youngest uncle, "please us with thy melody."

When Kalyan's voice melted into silence there was a murmur of approval.

"The moon is nearly full to-night," said second uncle, uncrossing his legs and standing up. "Let us go and look at the pool."

The party strolled out, youngest uncle softly trying out the refrain of Kalyan's song.

"Moon, jasmine and water," said Kalyan. "All this beauty is given to us."

"May I see Dasu on his way, father?" asked Gopal.

"By all means, but do not linger too long continuing our arguments of to-night, for I guess thy intentions."

"Dost thou remember our first meeting," said Gopal to Dasu, as they went on their way, "when second uncle took the photograph?"

"I remember it well. I was presumptuous in criticizing thy uncle's enthusiasm. I had not the right."

"What thinkest thou of his arguments to-day?"

"That there is some truth in them, but by no means all the truth. The two sides of which he spoke are beginning even now

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to muster their forces. The conflict between the old and the new may come in our time, and, apart from the profit seekers, many good and selfless men, alas! will be killed on both sides. Yet I do believe that in the end the middle way will be found. So I believe and so I hope."

They came to the empty moonlit park.

"Good sleep to thee, Dasu."

"And a fair waking, Gopal."



Chapter Nineteen

THE mountains rose all around against the sky ; immediately below was the town of Simla, set out like an elaborate toy. Gopal, overlooking the roof-tops of the houses in the next road down the mountainside, felt like a giant gazing on a pygmy world. Still further down lay the bazaar, thronged with minute men and beasts. Other little figures toiled up and down the long lanes of steps connecting the parallel roads. Gopal knew that the maze of lanes he could see was not the only means of getting about the town. There were other tracks, not obvious to a human, but as familiar to their users as the lanes were to him. These tracks ran across the roof-tops, along gutters, and down pipes, and were used by the thousands of monkeys that foraged everywhere. At meal-times the verandah on which he now stood would be invaded by a crowd of them, calling out with a loud cooing sound for any scraps of food left over. It was his pleasure to come out and feed them, studying their behaviour, which was as varied as that of a crowd of men. Some would fight their way to the front, holding back competitors with one arm

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while snatching at the food, some would cling to a good place but only put out their hands to receive what was given, a few would be jostled to the outskirts of the gathering and there wait hopelessly until all was over. Gopal noticed that one monkey, smaller than the others, was usually among these. Once, when the rest had gone, he had lingered on, a pathetic figure, still holding out his hand. Gopal had seen him from within, and come out again to give him a sweet. From that day he had always waited after the others had left, and Gopal had not failed to return with some scraps for him. In a short while he had become quite tame. Gopal had named him Hermit, and he readily answered to his name.

Beni joined Gopal on the verandah. They had been brought to Simla two months previously by Gopal's father, who had come there on a matter of business. It had been for them a time of great freedom and entertainment, with none to gainsay their doing whatever they wished to do.

"Where is thy monkey, Gopal?" said Beni. "Call out and see if he comes."

"Hermit! Come, Hermit, and take some food. Hermit!" shouted Gopal.

After he had called a few times the monkey dropped lightly from the roof on to the verandah rail.

"Bring something, Beni, for I have nothing to give him."

Beni went and returned with a small cluster of lichis. He gave one to the monkey, one to Gopal, and took one himself. The monkey watched the boys break the fragile green and red cases with their fingers, and tried to do the same. His hands were too small and clumsy. At last he gave up trying and stripped the fruit with his teeth.

"Hermit could be taught many things," said Beni. "He tries to imitate us in all we do."

"If he were not a wild creature, we could take him with us when we go back next week. What a stir we should make among the cousins. As it is we shall only have our stay at Delhi and

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Agra to speak of, and though we have beheld many beautiful sights it is difficult to interest people in talk of buildings they have not themselves seen."

"A certain man told me that Shah Jehan, he who built the Taj Mahal, had wished to build a pair to it in black marble, on the other side of the river, with a silver bridge joining the two, but that his son shut him away because he was bringing ruin on the people by the vast amounts of money he spent in building."

"That is one story," said Gopal, "but there is another which I saw performed by the travelling players. The son was greedy for power, and usurped his father's throne. I remember well the scene where the son reels drunken about the arena, and his father's head, covered with blood, is brought in on a dish. His terrible speech at the severed head of his father made us shudder."

"I should have liked to see that, a head on a dish."

"Yes, and the imitation of a drunk man was good too. Hast thou seen Hermit imitate me making a grimace. See this."

Gopal put on a ferocious expression. At once the monkey snarled back at him, but obviously in play. Beni laughed with pleasure.

"It would be good if we could take him, but I fear that the stir he would make among thy cousins would be as nothing to that among thy uncles. In any event, thy father would never permit it."

"I shall try to persuade him," said Gopal. "Now let us go to our mountain cave."

They went down the stairs and out into the road. Along in the direction of Little Simla the road forked. They took the left fork, which climbed at a steeper slope by a green bank overhung with trees, and came out on a wide causeway. Crossing this they pushed through a hedge of shrubs and let themselves down. About a third of the road on this side was supported by stout wooden beams. These beams, which were some eight feet high, took up the gap between the underpart of the road and the ground. They were now directly under the road. Here it was cool and gloomy and secret.

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"The people walk over our heads," said Gopal, "but none knows that we lie safely hid. I came alone yesterday and left a tin full of fried grain for us to eat. Here it is. Take some, Beni. Now we are dacoits in our mountain lair."

"The gods defend me if I am fallen among dacoits," said a strange voice. The boys, startled, looked in every direction, and finally in the depths behind them made out the figure of an old man seated with his back against one of the wooden beams. As they caught sight of him he rose slowly to his feet and came towards them. Despite his white beard he was gaily attired and on his head wore a bright turban. He carried a long staff in his hand.

"Greetings, friend," said Beni. "Are you then from Bengal, speaking our tongue?"

"I am from all parts and speak several tongues well enough for bargaining, but let us talk Hindustani now for it comes easier to me."

"Will you take some fried grain?"

The old man sat beside them and held out his hand.

"How came you to our hiding-place?" asked Gopal.

"I have long known of it. I slept here last night to break my journey."

"Have you far to go?"

"Only a few miles, to a fair over beyond Little Simla. I shall be there before midday. I am a pedlar and I have many fine things to sell. I will show you."

He returned to the place where they had first seen him sitting and lifted a large pack, which he carried forward to the daylight.

"Behold!" he said, opening the pack.

There were bangles of spun glass, pale green, rose, and sapphire, there were little images of gods, there were highly coloured pictures, and there were tubes of perfume and packets of sandal wood. These last exhaled a pleasing fragrance, and altogether the effect of his exhibition was like that of the opening of a fabulous treasure chest.

"I see that you admire," he said. "What of this? A charm of the

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goddess Lakshmi, bringing health and prosperity to all who wear it. It is gold, and the price—a mere five rupees. Consider, your honours, freedom from every known disease for five silver coins. The price is beyond you? Then buy this, attar of roses, only one anna.”

Gopal took the glass tube, and the pedlar closed his pack.

“I must be starting,” he said, “to get a good place.”

Gopal and Beni saw him on his way.

“We may meet this afternoon,” Gopal called after him, then to Beni, “I will ask my father to let us go to the fair. We have never been along that way and we shall see a new prospect of the mountains as well as the entertainment.”

After the midday meal, Gopal approached his father, and was given leave to go with Beni for the rest of the day. They set out gaily across the wide causeway and up by the wood bazaar, where many kinds of woodwork were sold. Gopal bought two sticks, and they strode on their way with much clatter and contentment. Once they had drawn clear of Simla they had the road to themselves except for the rare passing of a rickshaw. The clear mountain air made walking a delight, and they exclaimed in wonder as the winding road revealed green valleys with the littlest trees and silver streams, sheer down below them, or ancient crags frozen against the remote sky.

They made their journey of some seven miles in good time. The fair was in a wide grassy dell between two hillocks.

“On the great mountains there are little hills, and between the hills a fair,” said Gopal as they descended towards the crowd.

“There is our pedlar,” said Beni. “He has not many people round him; perhaps he has been unlucky in his trade, though I trust not.”

The pedlar greeted them as they approached.

“Welcome, brothers. You have not come too late to see the wrestling matches.”

“And how is your trade?” said Gopal. “Has it prospered?”

“Hear me and judge. All my glass bangles I sold around Simla, on my way; there were more than two hundred. The rest of my

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stock has gone here. All that remains is a few pictures and some of the golden charms, which are too costly for many men to buy."

"Thou hast done well," said Beni. "What is there here to see?"

"There are four magicians, some acrobats, an astrologer, and a vendor of remedies. These are old friends of mine. New acquaintances are one with a gambling game and a snake-charmer. But to us pedlars these things are not of such interest as they are to you. What pleases me is that a famous maker of kababs is over yonder. I go now to refresh myself. I advise you to try his wares."

The kabab-maker was doing a great trade. Before his charcoal fire were numbers of skewers on which were speared meat, onion, garlic, and green ginger, alternately from end to end. As fast as they were roasted he handed them, drenched in chili sauce, and each with a large cake of bread, to his clamouring customers. Beni and Gopal, who were hungry again after their walk, joined the pedlar in his open-air meal.

"That was most excellent," said Gopal, when they had finished. "Now let us see the wrestlers."

"Come this way," said the pedlar. "I myself am going to see the contests. They say that a man called 'The Tiger' throws anyone daring enough to challenge him."

The afternoon passed quickly for Gopal with the amusements offered on all sides, and it was quite late when he lost sight of Beni in the crush of people. He climbed to the higher ground and surveyed the dell, but could not see him. He went down again among the crowd, searching everywhere. He had just decided to wait for Beni at the point where the road back to Simla passed, when he thought he saw him in the distance walking along another road. He ran after the retreating figure, shouting:

"Beni! Beni! I am here. That is not the right road."

When he caught up with the supposed Beni he found that he had followed a stranger. He walked disconsolately back and took up his former position. The last stragglers departed from the fair ground, and night closed in swiftly over the mountains. Gopal waited on.

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At last he thought it best to find some stranger who was returning to Simla and join him. The road had been deserted enough in the afternoon, it would be frightening at night. He approached the only two men in sight, but neither was going his way. There was nothing to do but set out alone.

He walked briskly, trying to cheer himself by thinking of happy times in the past. His mind went back to that afternoon, years ago, when he had treated Beni harshly and the seller of sixteen spices had unwittingly made up their quarrel. But where was Beni now? He thought of the kite-flying season, of the festival of Kali and the fireworks, of the coming of the rains, when the boys all shouted for joy. But what could have happened to Beni? He remembered the night of the magic lantern at eldest uncle's house, and how he had cut down the branch of the tamarind tree. Then he tried to stop his thoughts. This was not the place to think of evil spirits, even if in daylight they were only rotten wood. Suddenly he halted. Nowhere on the way from Simla had the road been so steep and narrow. Despair weighed him down. He was lost among the mountains. In the faint but clear light of the stars their awful immensity threatened him? Then his mood altered. What did the mountains care for him. Aeons before the age of man they had been there, immovable; and if every man in the world died to-morrow they would remain unchanged. The utter silence of the night was broken by a horrible cat-like screeching. At last a panic terror seized Gopal. He ran back along the way he had come. He ran on and on, heeding nothing but his desire to find another human being in this deserted place of fear. At last he stumbled and fell from weariness. He lay sobbing for breath. Then he lay quiet.

After a while the moon floated up. A healing calm soothed his mind. He could not think why his terror had vanished as swiftly as it had come, but now he was quite self-possessed, and waiting—waiting for something that was going to happen.

"There was really nothing to fear," said a soft voice. It was the voice of the other Gopal, whom he had named Prince.

AN INDIAN BOYHOOD

"No! I was childish and foolish. I heard a noise, probably the cry of a wild cat, and fled. But, Prince, where art thou? I cannot see thee."

"Nor wilt thou. I have little time to stay with thee, my friend. Let us go."

Later on Gopal tried to recall the strange meeting but he could never remember more than these words, though he knew that he and Prince had talked happily together as in the days at the house with the white wall. When he again came to himself he was on another road, and, walking towards him in the moonlight, he saw Beni.

"The gods be thanked, at last I have found thee. O Gopal, where hast thou been?"

"Lost in the mountains. But how did I come to miss thee at the fair?"

"I slipped and hurt myself. When I recovered I could not find thee. It was late and I thought that maybe thou hadst set out for home. I ran along the Simla road a good way. Then I returned. Since then I have been walking back and forth and calling out for thee."

Gopal, knowing how afraid Beni was of evil spirits and demons, realized what an effort it must have been to him to remain in that lonely place. He was moved with gratitude.

"Where are we now, Beni?"

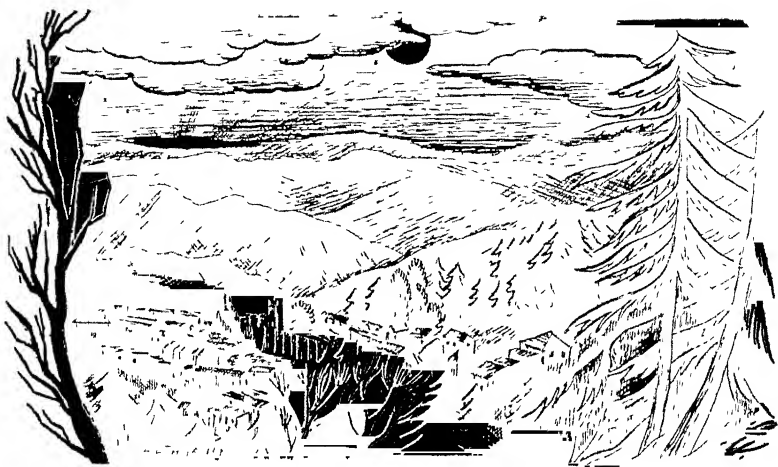
"On the road to Simla, but we have to go almost the whole distance we came this afternoon."

"No matter. We are together again and the moon is up. It will not take us much over two hours. But what of thy hurt, canst thou walk easily?"

"I was only grazed. I am quite recovered."

"Then let us go," said Beni, taking his arm.

Having found one another, their mood was as gay almost as in the afternoon. They talked all the way home, and it seemed but a little while later that they passed through the wood bazaar and descended into the sleeping town.



Chapter Twenty

“ONLY a few hours, and we shall be starting for home,” said Gopal to Beni. “How good it will be to see my mother again.”

“And for me to see mine.”

“I shall visit my cousins, and our friends. I shall go to see Nobin and old Abdul and Li-pen, with his golden fish. Then I shall write to tell Kalyan of all that has happened since we last met.”

“What of Hermit, are we allowed——?”

“Yes. My father says we may take him in a basket, but it must be our care to look after him.”

“Suppose he does not come before we start.”

“He is always waiting within call. Hermit! Come to us, Hermit.”

In a few moments the little monkey leapt down to the verandah rail. Gopal picked him up and carried him indoors.

“I was unhappy thinking of him waiting in vain after we had gone. Now all is well. See how gay he is to be with us. Hermit! Do not tear those papers. He will make much pleasure for Chenu and Bundle. Come, Beni, let us see that all is ready.”

AN INDIAN BOYHOOD

It was evening. A light two-wheeled carriage had taken the luggage and the basket containing Hermit; Gopal's father and the boys set out on foot for the station. As they made their way downhill, under the mountain cedars, Gopal felt that this was the beginning of a new part of his life. To be returning home now was like setting out on a fresh venture. The fussy little train that would take them down to Kalka, whence the great trains started, was giving out preparatory snorts and whistles, shaking to be off, while overhead the slowly wheeling birds seemed to be making ready for some immeasurably distant journey.

Carrying Hermit's basket, which they had fetched from among the other luggage, Gopal and Beni took their places in the train. Gopal's father stood by the carriage door until a whistle shrilled, then he joined them. As the door slammed the train began to move. It travelled slowly on to the next station, "Summer Hill", then it went more quickly. Gopal, looking from the carriage window, saw the westering sun burst suddenly into a splendour of flame and pistachio-green.

All over Simla, like homely stars, hundreds of lights sprang up, the nearer ones shining brightly, the more distant wavering and twinkling. As the train gathered speed the lights receded and vanished one by one, and the mountains moved away into the night.